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WEAR-DOWN HOLDS

1. Airplane spin
2. Arm drag
3. Arm lock
4. Asian spike
5. Atomic drop
6. Bear hug
7. Bite
8. Body slam
9. Body tackle
10. Bulldog
11. Chicken wing
12. Choke slam
13. Claw
14. Clothesline
15. Cross body block
16. Double axehandle
17. Drop kick
18. Eagle split
19. Elbow smash
20. Eye gouge
21. Face rake
22. Fireman's carry ram
23. Flying body press
24. Flying clothesline
25. Flying drop kick
26. Flying elbow drop
27. Flying head butt
28. Flying mare
29. Forearm smash
30. Foreign object
31. Full nelson
32. Giant swing
33. Grapevine
34. Hair pull
35. Hammer lock
36. Head lock
37. Head stomp
38. Hip roll
39. Irish whip
40. Knee drop
41. Leg lock
42. Leg sweep
43. Manager interference
44. Monkey flip
45. Overhead toss
46. Pole ram
47. Reverse chin lock
48. Rolling scissors
49. Rope burn
50. Russian sickle
51. Savate kick
52. Scissors grip
53. Shoulder breaker
54. Slingshot
55. Snap mare
56. Step-over toe hold
57. Suplex
58. Surfboard
59. Turnbuckle smash
60. Wrist lock

SET-UP HOLDS

61. Abdominal stretch
62. Avalanche
63. Backbreaker
64. Backroll press
65. Belly to belly
66. Big splash
67. Boston crab
68. Brain buster
69. Camel clutch
70. Cobra clutch
71. Cradle
72. Crucifix
73. DDT
74. Figure four
75. Flying leg drop
76. Gourd buster
77. Hurricanrana
78. Moonsault
79. Neckbreaker
80. Piledriver
81. Power bomb
82. Power slam
83. Scorpion deathlock
84. Sleeper
85. Slingshot suplex
86. Spine buster
87. Stunner
88. Sunset flip
89. Superplex
90. Texas cloverleaf

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CITY, STATE, ZIP CODE _____

WRESTLER'S NAME (DO NOT USE ANY REAL PRO WRESTLER NAMES) _____

WEAR-DOWN HOLDS: *Choose 10 of the holds at the left numbered 1-60. Only use a hold once.*

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____

6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10 _____

SET-UP HOLDS: *Choose 5 of the holds at the left numbered 61-90. Only use a hold once.*

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____

FINISHING HOLD: *Create your own custom final maneuver or choose a hold from our list.* _____

from the desk of...

OKAY, I'VE HAD enough. If I didn't care about living another 30 years or so, I'd grab both Vince McMahon and Bruno Sammartino by an ear, sit them both down in my office, and read them the riot act:

"Cut the crap already. You, Vince McMahon, are the number-one promoter in the world. You, Bruno Sammartino, are the greatest living former wrestler in the world. Why are you guys so damn stubborn? Why can't you put your past differences aside already? Doesn't it bother you, Bruno, that you are not in the WWE Hall of Fame? No, don't answer me. Let me talk. That goes for you, too, Vince. And Vince, doesn't it make you cringe when you look at the WWE Hall of Fame listing and its most important name is missing? Don't you know how much money this man can generate for the company on DVDs and Classics On Demand? Silence! Not a word out of either of you!

Okay, now that I have your attention, I want to apologize for the ear thing. Especially you, Bruno. That must have hurt. But someone had to take action. Time is wasting. The longer this takes, the slimmer the chance that this will be resolved.

"I know you've had your issues with the company, Bruno. You were repulsed by what WWE had made of the company you devoted your life to. You were angry that they turned the sport into a living cartoon, and then brought in the racy storylines and half-naked women. And then they admitted to the world that it wasn't really a sport. After working so long and hard to achieve a degree of credibility for the business and yourself, that hurt.

"You saw how performance-enhancing drugs were ravaging he bodies of wrestlers and it was your belief that WWE encouraged that behavior.

"You may or may not be right to hold those beliefs. I am not here to judge. But what I will say is that man over there has taken steps to make things right. Read the WWE Wellness Program, Bruno, and before you dismiss it as a toothless document, look at the results. Guys are getting suspended, important guys like Rey Mysterio Jr. whose image you would think they would want to protect.

"Look at the content of TV shows: wholesome, clean family entertainment. Just look at some of the companies that have climbed on board, image-conscious entities like Pepsi and 7-Eleven and the National Guard. That alone should tell you a lot.

"Bruno, you have long called for WWE to clean up its act. You might not trust their motives. That's fine. If it's only the bottom line that is guiding their conscience and has brought them to where they are now, don't you see that you have won the argument?

"Now, the two of you, shake hands. Let's look ahead to some exciting times. I'm sure Vince wants to talk to you about being a guest host on *Raw*. I can see by the look on your face that you're confused, Bruno. It's obvious you two have a lot to talk about."

***

Observant readers might have noticed that beginning in our previous issue, Kappa Publishing Group Inc. had reacquired PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED (and *Inside Wrestling/The Wrestler*) from Oscar De La Hoya's Golden Boy Enterprises. This is fabulous news. Golden Boy is a great company, but this is where these magazines always belonged. I will greatly miss working for *The Ring* magazine and alongside its talented staff, including Nigel Collins, Joe Santoliquito, Dave Romanosky, and Joe Rogan. I cherish their friendship and will never forget what they meant to my life.

Stu Saks
Publisher

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TNA

December 2009

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George Napolitano

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Milosz Wachowiak

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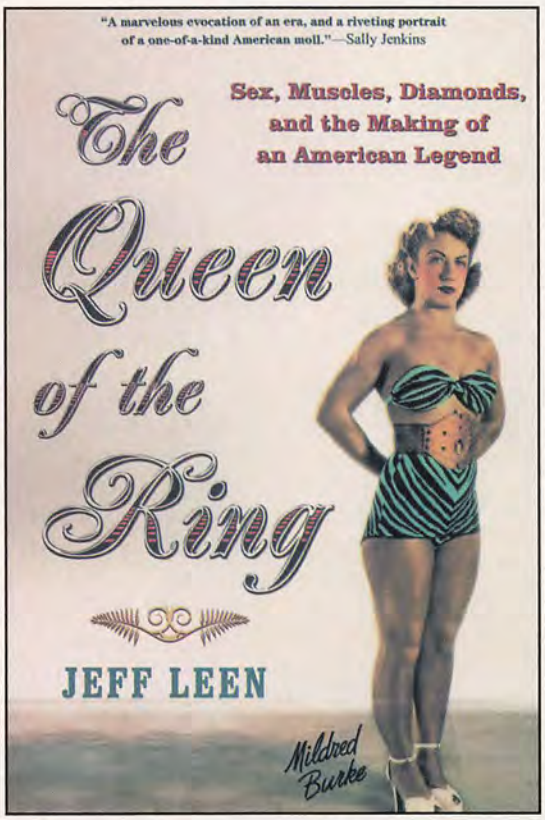
before the bell

Compiled by Gerry Strauss

The Queen Of The Ring

Mildred Burke was no Diva, that's for sure. She was a 5'2" block of granite who wrestled her way from Depression-era carnivals to the proverbial smoke-filled arenas of the sport's first golden era. Jeff Leen's excellent new book *The Queen Of The Ring: Sex, Muscles, Diamonds, And The Making Of An American Legend* (Atlantic Monthly Press, 304 pages, hardcover, $25) is an eye-opening account of Burke's rough life and legacy.


"A marvelous evocation of an era, and a riveting portrait of a one-of-a-kind American moll."—Sally Jenkins
The Queen of the Ring
Sex, Muscles, Diamonds, and the Making of an American Legend
JEFF LEEN
Mildred Burke

At a time when women's wrestling was banned in many states, Burke's gutsy, brawling style popularized the business from America to Japan, and, like Gorgeous George, she injected the game with previously unseen glamour. But it's not as if she simply emerged from her hardscrabble Kansas City roots knowing how to beat opponents with her patented "alligator clutch." The key to Burke's success was her partnership with promoter Billy Wolfe, a man Freddie Blassie once referred to as a "pimp."

The aptly named Wolfe realized Burke was a goldmine. To keep her under his control, he lured her into a twisted, loveless marriage—she eventually left him for his son, and that didn't work out, either—but Wolfe and Burke were a magical combination at the box office. The question as to who was most responsible for their success may have been at the heart of their eventual feud.

Leen's subplot involves Wolfe's grooming of June Byers to replace the aging Burke as champion, leading to the "history making" showdown in Atlanta, where Burke and Byers engaged in an hour-long contest that allegedly was unscripted. Much of Leen's research comes from Burke's unpublished memoirs, and since she was an old-timer protecting the industry, it's hard to believe Burke's claim that many of her bouts were genuine "shooting matches." Mae Young knew both Burke and Byers and dismissed them as real wrestlers; she recalled the Atlanta bout as a stinker. Also, a clip of Burke on the Internet shows her relying on the same choreography used by all wrestlers in the 1940s. As to whether Burke vs. Byers was legit or not, Leen leaves the door open.

Leen's background as a Pulitzer-winning reporter at *The Washington Post* is what makes *The Queen Of The Ring* superior to most wrestler biographies. Leen depicts Burke as a bitter, paranoid woman, fighting like a cornered dog to keep her career alive as the men in her life try to manipulate her. He's reaching when he compares Burke to Seabiscuit or "Cinderella Man" Jim Braddock, as is The Fabulous Moolah, who is quoted comparing Burke to Amelia Earhart. But in a field dominated by males, Burke's accomplishments were major. She was certainly an American original.

Ironically, Millie Burke spent her later years promoting girls who wrestled in bikinis (or topless). Burke filmed these seedy sessions and sold them through mail order catalogues during the heyday of 1970s "apartment house" wrestling. In the end, Burke was a flesh peddler, just like Billy Wolfe.

—Don Stradley

Talkin' Trash

Here's a list of the top 10 wrestling related items you've been talking about lately and our gut reaction to each:

10. *Smackdown* commentator Jim Ross, along with several WWE superstars, appears on an episode of The Food Network's *Kitchen Impossible*. Could good ol' J.R. be preparing for a career as a TV chef?

9. Ricky Steamboat Jr. teams up with his dad against Orlando Colon and Hiram Tua at WWC's Summer Madness. Those who remember Rick Sr. bringing Baby Ricky to ringside several times in 1989, step forward: You are now officially old.

8. *The Rise And Fall Of WCW* DVD is released to rave reviews and strong sales. Heck, Buff Bagwell alone bought 573 copies.

7. Scott Hall states in several interviews that he wants to return to WWE as a commentator. Not so sure that would fly, but he could certainly be a natural enemy for "Straight-Edger" C.M. Punk.

6. TNA's Daniels is arrested on a DUI charge after allegedly partying with WWE's Shane Helms. Here's hoping that Daniels can move past this incident, keep his nose clean, and continue with his career.

5. TNA World champion Kurt Angle is arrested and temporarily detained as a result of a complaint filed by ex-girlfriend Trenisha Biggers (p.k.a. Rhaka Khan). See Daniels.

4. Rey Mysterio Jr. receives a 30-day unpaid suspension for violating the WWE Wellness Policy by failing to clear a prescription drug with the company. See Kurt Angle.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

3. Ring of Honor main-eventers Bryan Danielson and Nigel McGuiness sign with WWE. Is this the beginning of the end for ROH, or another opportunity for new stars to step in and reinvent the promotion once again?

2. Dixie Carter appears on-camera during *Impact* for the first time to officially announce the signing of Bobby Lashley. She's a lot easier on eyes (and ears) than Mr. McMahon.

1. The Undertaker returns to WWE at SummerSlam. With Jeff Hardy gone and Mysterio temporarily out of the picture, "The Dead Man" once again shows how vital he is to the organization.

The Internet Insider

The following wrestling-related items were culled from various wrestling websites—or were they? See if you can pick out the items that were actually reported on the Internet (which doesn't necessarily mean they are true) and the ones we blatantly made up. The answers appear at the end of this column on page 9.

1. Is reality TV taking over pro wrestling? Pro Wrestling Unplugged, a Philadelphia-area independent promotion, recently announced that former reality star/local radio personality Danny Bonaduce would compete against local pro Nick Berk at its September event. Also to appear on the same card was former *Survivor* star Johnny Fairplay.

2. WWE *Raw*'s weekly guest host initiative has been so successful that A-level celebrities are said to be clamoring for the chance to appear. Indeed, Will Ferrell is currently in talks with WWE and could sign on in time to promote his upcoming movie *The B Team*.

Photo by George Napolitano

3. On-again, off-again rumors of a Mick Foley sitcom vehicle are on again, with TNA announcer Jeremy Borash now in negotiations to co-star as a "wacky" neighbor. Spike TV is interested in producing the program but has reportedly balked at Foley's suggestion to add Terry Funk as his "off the wall" father.

4. It looks like former *Raw* host and *Entourage* star Jeremy Piven is just as smooth in real life as the character he plays on HBO. Piven was recently on display for thousands to see on the big screen at a New York Jets game alongside WWE's Kelly Kelly.

One To Watch

The past several years in professional wrestling have taught us that two types of athletes are likely to make an impact in our sport: skilled amateur wrestlers and those who come from wrestling families. Imagine if one individual had both things going for him? Enter Nick Logan.

At just 22 years of age, the young man from Lowell, Massachusetts, already has a world of experience on the mat, as well as a learning tree that includes his brothers Matt and Bryan, a successful tag team in their own right.

Nick actually began his pro training when he was 15, learning under the likes of Killer Kowalski and Mike Hollow at the Chaotic Training Center. He competed in his first match against Matt, and soon won the New England Wrestling Alliance tag team title alongside Bryan. His knowledge of freestyle wrestling, Greco-Roman techniques, and Brazilian jiu-jitsu provided a solid background for a pro career.

Before that could happen, however, Logan had to compete his education.

After competing for four years at Lowell High School, he enrolled at Rhode Island College. During that time, he compiled over 90 varsity wins and was a two-time All-Conference wrestler. He placed fourth in the New England College Conference Tournament as a junior and third as a senior.

Photo by Joe Zanolle

Now finished with college, Logan is finally embarking on a full-time career as a pro. Not long ago, he reemerged alongside his brothers in the East Coast Wrestling Association, where he scored his biggest win yet by defeating Rob Eckos to win the Mid-Atlantic championship. His multifaceted mat skills have given opponents fits, and many predict the huge wins will keep on coming for this young man.

We Heard That!

"I'm like, good grief, this guy does everyone else's move and hasn't come up with one. He's a heck of an athlete. Morrison. Yeah, I've seen him do a lot of Low Ki's moves. He does my Spiral Tap. I was like, 'Man, this guy watches a lot of tape.'"

—A.J. Styles, speaking of the WWE's John Morrison's propensity for mimicking other wrestlers' moves during an interview on IGN.com

"At times, it's a little obnoxious to have so many people in your ear. You have to listen to your [announcing] partner, the executive producer, and the company owner while trying to follow the talent in the ring and tell a story. I only have two ears, not six."

—Taz, venting about the frustrations he experiences as a WWE announcer during an interview with syndicated columnist Alex Marvez

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

"I had some fun in WWE. I learned a lot, made some friends. It's a corporation, I am a human. This human didn't fit into the corporation's plans, and that corporation didn't fit with my human side. I had some laughs, but I am awfully happy the ride is over, and I don't want back on."

—Brian Kendrick, commenting on his recent release from the WWE on dragongateusa.com

"I called WWE and told them I did not want to come back. I was getting tired of all the travel and knew I wouldn't want to go back as

an interviewer or something. They were willing to work with me and find something for me, but it was time for me to go. My heart wasn't in it. Do I think it was lame that I got the 'future endeavors' message instead of even a 'Torrie has retired' message? Yes. But a week later I was over it."

—Former WWE Diva Torrie Wilson, ruminating over her separation from the WWE on diva-dirt.com

"When, or if it's going to happen, who knows? But I think that ever since I came back, there were all the rumblings even before I came back that I was going to re-team with him ... I think that it's something the fans want to see."

—Christian, discussing a possible reunion with former partner Edge on IGN.com

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caption me!

Think you're a better writer than the editors at *PWI*? Here's your chance to prove it, punk! This shot of Eugene taking the clippers to Eric Bischoff deserves a short, concise, and downright uproarious caption. If you think you are up to the challenge, e-mail your zany quips to prowrestlingillustrated@yahoo.com, or slap a stamp on an envelop and snail-mail it to "Caption Me!," Box 96, Fort Washington, PA 19034. Three issues from now, we'll share with you the best of the bunch—and the funnier the better!

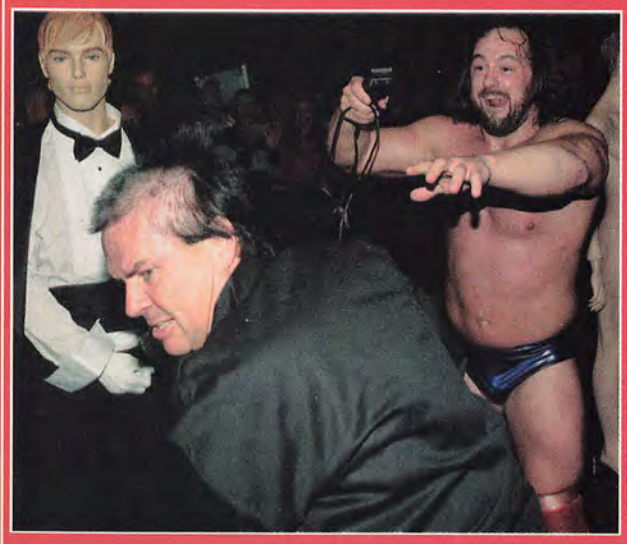

Photo By Gary Dineen

October s Best

Van Dam: "Funny, but I can only do this after 4:20 in the afternoon."

—Dennis Vandervort, Gainesville, FL

We could've used him on the '92 Olympic gymnastics team.

—Carol Vick, Chester, PA

RVD has flexibility, among other things, to burn.

—C_Bass@earthlink.net

RVD: "I hope those were my tights that just ripped!"

—Lawrence Browne, Rochester, NY

A young Rob Van Dam demonstrates the textbook counter to ???

—Atlee Murray, St. Louis, MO

Answers to Internet Insider:

Answers 1 and 4 are the real deal

ringside

With Bill Meltzer

THE STRANGE AND seemingly endless drama surrounding **Jeff Hardy's** stalled long-term contract negotiations with WWE took another odd turn when Hardy gave notice to federation officials of his intention to leave the promotion. The "Rainbow Haired Warrior" was in the midst of the most sustained push of his career, headlining the Smackdown roster and engaging in a red-hot feud with **C.M. Punk**.

In departing WWE, Hardy cited a desire to work fewer days and gain greater freedom to pursue his non-wrestling passions, such as music.

While both Hardy and WWE management left the door open for a return, there were some ruffled feathers on both sides. Hardy was frustrated that he could not get the concessions from WWE that he wanted. Meanwhile, federation officials were miffed that the aptly nicknamed "Enigma" would leave at a time when he was slotted in a headlining role that all wrestlers covet but few attain.

Hardy lost a loser-leaves-WWE cage match to Punk on Smackdown and was assaulted from behind by the champion as he bowed to the audience before heading to the locker room. Following his departure from WWE, Hardy found himself in some deep trouble. Just a week after leaving the company, Hardy's Cameron, North Carolina, home was raided by police, who claim to have found a slew of illegal drugs. As of press time, Hardy was scheduled for court at the end of September, facing two felony counts of trafficking as well as two felony counts of possession.

To add to the troubles faced by Smackdown with Hardy's leaving, WWE suspended Rey Mysterio Jr. for 30 days after a violation of its Wellness Policy. Mysterio was allowed to work an additional week before his suspension took effect in order to resolve his feud with Dolph Ziggler. With the loss of Hardy and Mysterio, the returning Undertaker quickly resumed his role as Smackdown's top fan favorite.

It looks as though **Jeff Jarrett** may be staying in TNA after all, but maybe not in the role fans have become accustomed to. After a controversial falling-out with **Kurt Angle**, Jarrett had been working on TNA assignments from home and

Although Jeff Hardy was no longer WWE World champ he still figured prominently in Smackdown's title scene. Given his role in the brand, WWE officials were surprised Hardy took a leave of absence.

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had not been appearing on *Impact*. Jarrett, who has been in the TNA World championship picture for most of the company's history, has allegedly expressed a desire to develop new programming for TNA and take on more of a mid-card role in the ring.

Part of the reason why Jarrett may take on a less prominent in-ring role is the heavy emphasis TNA has placed on **Bobby Lashley** leading the fight against the **Main Event Mafia** heel faction. In a recent interview, Lashley said that TNA has been very supportive of his ambitions to continue his MMA career while also making wrestling appearances. When asked about making the adjustment to TNA's six-sided ring as opposed to the traditional wrestling ring and the MMA-style octagon, Lashley responded, "I don't think there's any difference."

Ever since his departure from WWE, **Ken Anderson**, the former **Ken Kennedy**, has taken a series of verbal shots at his former employer and several of its headlining stars. In particular, Anderson has publicly accused **John Cena** and **Randy Orton** of using their power and influence to drive him out of WWE. According to Anderson, Cena and Orton could not handle his pacing and overall roughness in the ring and told management they would no longer work with him and would advise other stars to do the same. Orton's anger reportedly stemmed from an in-ring incident where Kennedy accidentally dropped him on his head, causing him neck pain.

Orton has now fired back at Anderson. In response to the allegations of going to management, Orton stated, "I did tell Ken that he shouldn't be dropping me on my head. He never said sorry, and even called me a liar after the match! I remember looking at him in disbelief. And yes, I did tell management I did not want to work with him after that. Who wouldn't? That's my side."

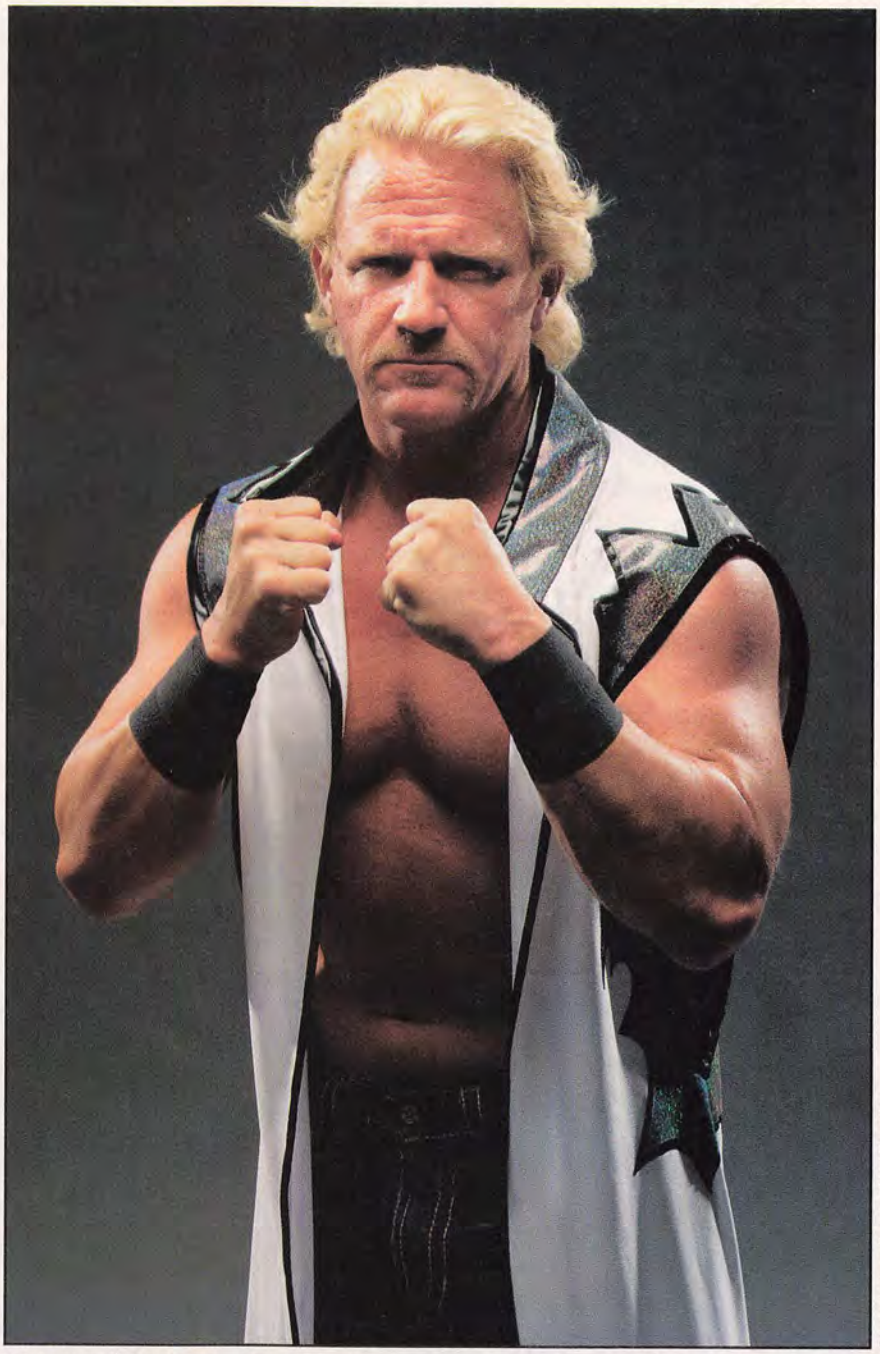

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Although Jeff Jarrett may yet be back on *Impact*, don't expect to see him spearhead the fight against the Main Event Mafia. Jarrett is working on company projects from home for now and might assume as mid-card position if he returns to TV.

Orton is also reportedly miffed at **Nick Dinsmore**, whose return to WWE proved to be short-lived. He was quickly released from his contract after he reported noticeably overweight. The former **Eugene** had been slated for a talent-development role in which he would work with up-and-coming talent at WWE house shows and report on the wrestlers' progress.

"Eugene was just given a second chance," Orton told the U.K. *Sun*. "He came back two weeks ago and came in a little heavy from where [management] wanted him to come in. Nick is a good friend of mine. I pulled some strings to get his job back and he comes back all overweight. So, all in all, I am a little upset with him right now."

Two of WWE's top Divas

women's division and her own role while WWE management allegedly felt the attitude and performance of the "Glamazon" had taken a negative turn. Phoenix did not appear on any WWE television for nearly a month, and **Rosa Mendes** was removed as her associate and paired instead with **Carlito**. It appears, however, that fences have at least temporarily been mended, and Phoenix has since returned to television, most notably scoring a battle royal victory to earn a shot at James' Divas title on *Raw*.

James, meanwhile, drew the ire of **Stephanie McMahon** for her in-ring behavior in a disastrous match on *Raw* against **Gail Kim**. James and Kim had problems working together in the ring, and Kim ended up sustaining a concussion. James was visibly (and vocally) frustrated during the match, and the finish was satisfying to no one. James was subsequently reprimanded by management for unprofessional behavior before the incident was put to rest, but not before Stephanie let it be known that future non-storyline outbursts will not be tolerated.

WWE CEO **Linda McMahon** is reportedly considering running for a Connecticut Senate seat. She would run as a Republican in opposition to incumbent **Chris Dodd** in the 2010 elections. Earlier this year, McMahon was appointed to the Connecticut Board of Education.

Michelle McCool suffered a leg injury at a recent WWE house show and will miss some time. Meanwhile, several former WWE performers now working with TNA have been critical of McCool for adopting an identical finishing move to **A.J. Styles**' signature Styles Clash without giving him credit or asking permission behind the scenes. Exacerbating the situation is the Women's champ's seemingly nonchalant attitude about the accusations. In a recent Twitter post, somebody asked why she "stole" Styles' finisher, and McCool responded, "I guess b/c I had nothing better to do .... sorry!"

Could **Shannon Moore** be making a WWE return soon? It's quite possible. While it's commonplace for former WWE wrestlers to appear backstage to greet their one-time colleagues, such interactions usually take place out of the public eye. Recently, though, when **Hurricane Helms** defeated **Paul Burchill**, Moore accompanied **Matt Hardy** into the ring to congratulate Hurricane. Hardy later posted an image on his Twitter account of the three friends posing together in the ring.

Hulk Hogan has reached out to TNA to express interest in making appearances for them. Hogan last teased a TNA appearance in 2003, but a planned match with Jeff Jarrett was quickly scrapped by Hogan, who cited his chronic knee problems. It's believed that

Women's champion Michelle McCool has garnered criticism from some former WWE wrestlers and fans by making A.J. Styles' Styles Clash finisher her own.

Photo by George Napolitano

According to Tommy Rich, Freebird Michael Hayes often hid behind the talents of partners Terry Gordy and Buddy Roberts. Rich also contends that Hayes ran his mouth in order to mask his deficiencies in the ring.

Hogan is attempting to leverage negotiations with TNA to land a larger deal with WWE. Hogan has gone through a highly publicized divorce and seen lukewarm interest in the continuation of his *Celebrity Championship Wrestling* reality show venture that he co-funded along with **Eric Bischoff**.

In a recent interview **Tommy "Wildfire" Rich** minced no words in identifying **Michael Hayes** as one of the few fellow wrestlers of his era whom he does not respect. Rich said that Hayes attempted to subvert other performers, hid behind his gift of gab, and relied too heavily on the in-ring talents of his **Freebirds** cohorts, **Terry Gordy** and **Buddy Roberts**, to mask his own modest abilities.

Rich also said that he takes pride in the fact that he's a former NWA World champion, no matter how brief his reign was. Said Rich, "They can call me a seven-day wonder. They can call me whatever they want to call me, but the bottom line is that those calling the names, they ain't never been there. I'm up there with the real World heavyweight champions when wrestling was wrestling ... Nowadays, they got 15 world heavyweight champions. What's up with that?"

The wrestling world is mourning the recent passings of **Karl Von Hess**, **Al Tomko**, **"Whirlwind" Woodie Johnson**, **Jason "D.J. Rizz" Smith**, **Peter Goodman**, and longtime female competitor **Gladys "Kill 'em" Gillem**.

Born **Frank Faketty**, Von Hess got his start in the wrestling business prior to the outbreak of World War II, and was trained by the legendary **Joe Dusek**. His career was interrupted by service in the U.S. Navy during the war, where he served as an underwater demolition specialist in the Pacific theater of combat. After resuming his career and seeing the dawn of televised wrestling, Faketty became one of wrestling's most successful heels under the persona of an unreconstructed German Nazi. He went on to engage in numerous money-drawing feuds, particularly a sustained series of matches with **Antonino "Argentina" Rocca**.

Tomko was a longtime headliner and promoter in Canada, primarily active in the provinces of Manitoba and British Columbia. Gillem, a pioneer of women's wrestling, got her start in carnivals, sometimes wrestling men. In her early days, she also wrestled bears and alligators. She remained active in the ring until the early-1960s. Johnson primarily worked in the northeastern U.S. in the 1960s and '70s.

Smith, a 26-year-old independent wrestler based in northern California, died from injuries suffered in a head-on car crash in Crocket, California. Goodman was a lower-mid-card heel in the western U.S. and worked preliminary matches as a foreign heel in Japan and South Korea. Our sincere condolences go out to the friends and family of all of the deceased. □

quick count

By Al Castle

COLORFUL COSTUMES, elaborate masks, scary monsters, and a healthy dose of blood and gore.

No, it's not the latest wrestling pay-per-view, it's Halloween. And in honor of the biggest fright night of the year, I bring you a particularly chilling edition of "Quick Counts."

Wicked Witch? TNA President Dixie Carter has taken an increasingly hands-on role in running the country's second largest wrestling company. And some of the decisions she's made have likely not endeared her to some of her employees.

Those calls have included sending TNA co-founder Jeff Jarrett home for several weeks following a scandal involving the "King Of The Mountain" shacking up with Kurt Angle's estranged wife, Karen, firing longtime Jarrett cronies Savio Vega and Dutch Mantel from their behind-the-scenes jobs, and expressing a desire to shake up TNA's business model, including nixing monthly PPVs and moving away from pushing middle-aged former stars from the Monday Night War era.

Carter's stances may have lost her some points with certain members of TNA's old boy's club, but it's about time someone in power made the tough choices necessary to improve TNA's stagnant product. Carter is running a wrestling company, not trying to win a popularity contest.

Jack-o-Lantern. Among the dark shadows cast by the towering egos on Raw, there has been one shining beacon of hope for some new blood in the brand's main-event picture. The man shining that bright light is Jack Swagger.

Less than a year after debuting in WWE last fall, "The All-American American" has already held the ECW championship on two occasions, and has more recently injected a new dose of energy on Raw. And, with Triple-H, Randy Orton, and John Cena having monopolized the top of the cards for years now, it's desperately needed.

Perhaps the best evidence of Swagger's momentum came in this magazine's annual "*PWI* 500." Swagger jumped a remarkable 204 spots from his rank at 222 last year to number 18 in 2009.

There's a reason that Swagger's career has soared over the last year as other young stars have floundered in WWE. While other up-and-comers are waiting for someone to make them a star, Swagger has long believed he already is one. As such, he looks, wrestles, and acts the part. And his flame will only burn brighter in coming years.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Dixie Carter may not be making many friends with her recent decisions in TNA, but that isn't what she is there for. Contributing Writer Al Castle feels that Carter is 100 percent right for standing her ground. After all, it is her company.

Haunted House. It's not often this magazine would reference a competitor, but a recent eye-catching pictorial in *WWE Magazine* is worth mentioning. It featured "The Hart Dynasty"—David Hart Smith, Natalya Neidhart, and Tyson Kidd—photographed in what appeared to be the legendary "Hart Dungeon."

Alongside of historic photos of other dungeon graduates training in the basement of the Hart family home, the pictures of the latest generation of the extended Hart clan standing among the dingy, wood-paneled walls and duct-tape covered weight bench appeared authentic enough.

But, considering the Hart family no longer owns the home, it is apparent that the respective offspring of Davey Boy Smith, Jim Neidhart, and protégé of Bret Hart were posed on a set designed to look like the "Dungeon."

While it may have been nothing more than an elaborate backdrop, one has to wonder what kind of memories it evoked in the three young WWE stars, who likely spent countless hours during their formative years hearing the screams of the Dungeon's many students, or victims. And, as gifted as the trio is, you wonder how much better they could be if "The Hart Dungeon" were still at their disposal.

Ghost Stories. Some of the drama surrounding Kurt Angle's life outside of the sport of wrestling has brought to mind eerily similar tales from the personal lives of other wrestlers—some of whom are not here to tell them.

Allegations such as domestic violence, run-ins with law enforcement, illegal drug charges, reports of mounting injuries and constant pain, and anguish over a troubled marriage. Unfortunately, wrestlers like Chris Benoit, Chris Adams, and Eddie Guerrero all went through some or all of those same problems. We know how it ended for them.

Kurt Angle's personal demons were well documented before he joined TNA three years ago. Since that time, there's little evidence that things have changed for the better. But there are plenty of red flags that should have Angle's colleagues, family, and friends on high alert.

Masquerade Ball. Decades after names like Mr. Wrestling, the Assassins, and the Masked Superstar rose to prominence, the great tradition of masked wrestlers is all but extinct. And it's a real shame.

The theory by promoters these days is that covering the face of a wrestler only hinders his ability to connect with audiences. But, when done right, just the opposite is true.

For proof of that, look no further than Rey Mysterio Jr.—one of WWE's most popular stars and a top buy at the merchandise stand. And what item of Mysterio merchandise flies off the shelves? Replica masks.

Over history, masks have contributed to the marketability and personality of countless wrestlers. Even TNA's Suicide instantly made a big splash with audiences largely because of his mysterious look.

And for wrestlers lacking in the natural charisma department, a mask can be just what the doctor ordered.

Trick or Treat. TNA's overuse of the age-old "swerve" has soured a lot of today's wrestling fans on the thrill of occasionally pulling the rug out from under them. But tricking fans can still add something to a wrestling product—when executed properly.

The two ends of the swerve spectrum were on display in August. TNA's Hard Justice was the latest show from the company to end with a predictably unpredictable storyline turn. After assuring Matt Morgan that they were on the same side, Kurt Angle turned on him. It seemed the only person in the world surprised by the twist was Morgan.

On WWE *Monday Night Raw* a few weeks later, guest host Dusty Rhodes booked his son, Cody, to get a heavyweight title shot against then-champion Randy Orton, and made John Cena the guest referee. But just when the match was about to start, Rhodes revealed a double-cross, as Cody and Orton double-teamed Cena in the ring. Many a fans' jaw dropped in disbelief.

The lesson was apparent. Shocking fans with a storyline twist only works when it truly is a shock. That means not doing it every couple of weeks. If your family threw you a surprise party every year on your birthday, it would quickly cease to be much a surprise. □

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Too often do promotions use the "twist" to end a story or show. But WWE got it right with the Dusty twist, Castle says. The clichéd turn can still be effective, if not used at every opportunity.

in focus

By Dave Lenker

(WISHING HE WAS) BEATING A DEAD HORSE

So ironic that WWE began pushing its *Rise And Fall Of WCW* DVD late this summer. Ironic and perhaps terribly painful for at least one … well, I'd call him a superstar, but even in the generic sense in which WWE throws that word around, I'm not sure he qualifies any longer.

I refer to the man formerly known as Chavo Guerrero Jr. Truth be told, he is still known as Chavo Guerrero Jr., but if I were him, I think I'd go back to the old Kerwin White moniker or something. I don't know that I'd feel comfortable using the Guerrero name.

But back to the irony part. Of course, WWE couldn't let this shameless plug opportunity pass without taking potshots at its old (now nonexistent) rival. D-X and Santino Marella spoofing The Shockmaster? Good for half a chuckle for those of us who remember that ill-fated gimmick. I've not yet had a chance to view the DVD, but I hear the history of WCW is of the revisionist variety. Nonetheless, it's more of a big picture look at a once-viable promotion. It certainly wasn't lousy gimmicks that ultimately killed WCW. Yet, as D-X reveled in the awfulness of Shockmaster, Johnny B. Badd, and so forth, WWE was giving us weekly doses of Chavo Jr. vs. Hornswoggle.

Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, children of all ages, I have an announcement for you. Tell all your friends that you witnessed history this summer. That's right, you had a front-row seat to the … worst … feud … of … all-time. Hands down. No question about it. I went back and reviewed every feud in the history of the sport at any level. It's true. And I'm not even sure it's confined to wrestling feuds. Pick any two bickering four-year-olds in a sandbox and I guarantee I'd rather watch that play out over a long, hot, humid afternoon. Chavo vs. Hornswoggle is less interesting.

Please … somebody … Vince … anybody, make it go away!

Seriously, we've seen them do battle in the locker room, in a blindfold match, in some sort of bull-rope match, and about 143 other matches that I fear I've seen but can't quite remember and refuse to go back and research.

You don't want to know how many hours of wrestling I have watched live, on TV, on videotape, and on DVD since joining the *PWI* staff in May 1993. Some truly memorable and wonderful stuff on cards

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Hornswoggle takes a flying leap onto Chavo Guerrero Jr. Senior Writer Dave Lenker can find no redeeming quality to their feud whatsoever.

both huge and tiny for sure, but also lots of exhausting TV tapings and mostly horrendous indy shows. I've seen guys just out of wrestling school saddled with gimmicks bordering on horrific. I've seen small cards that have lasted two hours too long. I've watched indy shows in which guys allegedly trade barbs on the microphone in "arenas" with such poor sound systems that no one in attendance has a clue as to what they are saying to each other. I saw Steve Corino in his early days, for goodness' sake!

Heck, did you know there are independent cards in North Carolina at which you can buy a pickle at the concession stand? This has been worse.

Yes, I'll admit, I even paid attention during the last two years of WCW, when the fall quickly turned into a freefall. I watched The Dog. I saw Buff Bagwell and David Flair wrestle in some sort of DNA match or something. I remember Tank Abbott in Three Count. I saw commissioners, presidents, and other authority figures put their positions on the line against each other as we all tried to figure out who outranked whom.

I'm here to tell you that that stuff was infinitely more entertaining. This is comedy at its worst. I can't imagine what it must be like for Chavo or even Hornswoggle or even Evan Bourne, who threatened to lose whatever cool appeal he had among WWE fans by interjecting himself into this mess. What's especially fun is that as many times as poor Mr. Guerrero gets humiliated, there is always another match waiting for him the following Monday night, with the guaranteed same humiliating ending. Contrived and awful, every last millisecond. I may have lost close to an hour of my life watching this. Now I've been compelled by some demonic force within me to condemn it all on these pages.

Some of you will remember Chavo Jr.'s "crazy" stage in WCW—back when the promotion was rising. You'll remember how he hopped around on a stick horse named Pepe. Some of us liked the campiness as he feuded with Uncle Eddie. Others hated it. Alas, in the end, Norman Smiley fed Pepe to a wood chipper. What do you think Chavo would do to have the golden days of Pepe back?

THE FINE LINE BETWEEN JAMIE NOBLE AND REY MYSTERIO JR.

Kudos to Bryan Danielson for agreeing to a deal with WWE. He's taking a shot at the big time for the right reason—that's right, the money.

I know it's easy to bash professional athletes for following the green, but I commend Danielson because he is going into this with his eyes open, and those eyes aren't seeing a sky full of stars and nothing else. At the beginning of this decade, before he was anyone, really, Danielson signed a WWE developmental deal and competed briefly in Memphis Championship Wrestling. Around the same time MCW closed up, WWE released Danielson. In the years since, as he has established himself as arguably the greatest wrestler in the U.S. not under contract to WWE or TNA (and one of the best in the U.S. period) and flirted with WWE—even appearing on some of the old secondary shows from time to time. Now he's ready to give it a second try. I've read where Danielson has commented that in his heart, he'd love to remain an independent wrestler for the duration of his career but needs to be sure he can take care of future medical bills.

It tells me he isn't dreaming of the day he holds the WWE title belt aloft as confetti cascades down onto the ring in celebration of the conclusion of another WrestleMania.

It'd be nice, but he has seen Brian Kendrick and Jamie Noble shine so brightly in Ring of Honor just as he has … and become forgotten men in WWE so quickly thereafter.

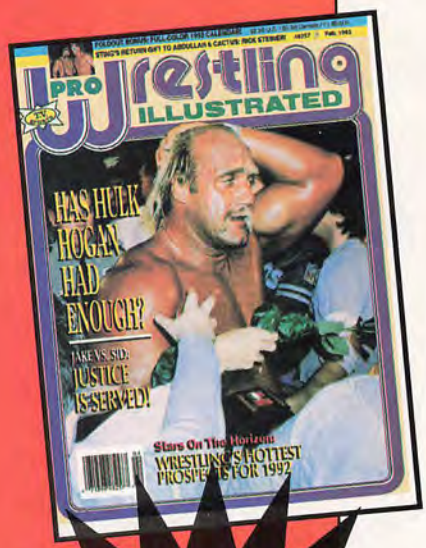
Like anyone else his size, superstardom in WWE is a longshot for him, but the good money is the good money. Can you honestly say you wouldn't take it? Ever heard of a CFL football star turn down a sweet NFL deal because he just loves the CFL too much?

Danielson might have the unorthodox skill set and charisma to rise above that lack of size, but again, didn't some of us think the same of Kendrick? My guess is there will be a small window of opportunity for him to turn into something special, but that window will close quietly. I hope I am wrong, but Danielson will probably end up on the level of stars that get switched from Raw to Smackdown in the supplemental portion of the annual WWE draft that you can watch exclusively on wwe.com.

Some of the trips from one town to the next will probably feel long and maybe a little depressing as he preps for another seven-minute match. But it doesn't mean he didn't make the right choice. □

Photo by George Tahinos

In Ring of Honor, Bryan Danielson was given an opportunity to showcase his brilliant ability against opponents such as Go Shiozaki. Regardless of his level of success in WWE, Lenker will not second-guess Danielson's decision to move on.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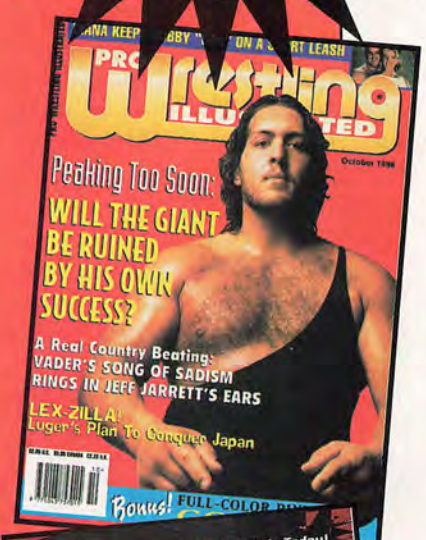
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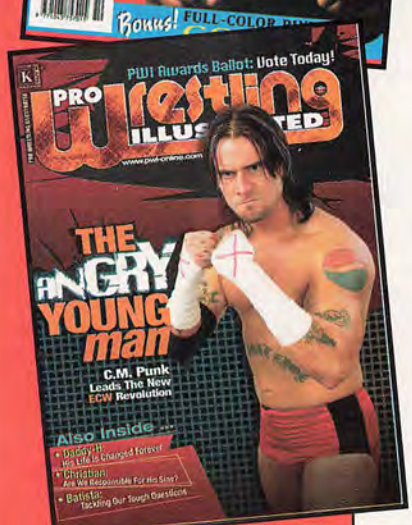

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August 2006: Exclusive! Edge Comes Out Swinging! Plus: Brother Runt, Benoit & Lashley, Milano Collection AT.

December 2006: The Angry Young Man! C.M. Punk Leads The New ECW Revolution. Also: Triple-H, Christian, Batista.

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off the top rope

By Brandi Mankiewicz

If you wish to contribute to Brandi's mailbag, send your letters to:
TOP ROPE Box 96 Ft. Washington, PA 19034
Or send e-mail to: **offthetoprope@yahoo.com**

(Editor's note: The opinions expressed in this column are those of the letter writers and Brandi Mankiewicz herself. They do not necessarily reflect the editorial views of this magazine.)

EVERY MONTH I dread sorting through your drivel in search of letters worth using. Unfortunately, many letters smell—both literally and figuratively. Some are completely unintelligible.

Occasionally, there are the intelligible, non-odoriferous ones. While I appreciate their condition, the subject matter can be either syrupy or the writers treat me as some sort of deity. Others, though, tell me of the numerous orifices into which I can stick any number of hot pokers. I guess I have that polarizing effect on people.

After whittling down this pile of pandering and hatemongering, I sometimes can find some almost intelligent letters. Granted, it's after dumping more than 50 e-mails into my trash and setting aside about two dozen snail mails.

I feel dirty from your correspondence and want to strip down and get into the shower, but I will instead finish plowing through your letters and provide my usual insightful responses. I'm sure you expect nothing less from your champion. Now pass me the hand sanitizer, please.

Hello Miss Queen,

Next weeks guest host on *Raw* is *PWI*'s Brandi Mankiwicz … Okay, it's your show for one night. What would you do? Hopefully, make it watchable for one night.

ROBERT LESKI
Sonofafrog316@aol.com

El hijo de una rana,

I'm not sure anyone would truly want to see me as the guest host of *Raw*—or at least I assume you mean me, since you spelled my last name wrong. **sigh**

There is no way I could top Bob Barker as GM. He was truly amazing. I'm not even a *Price Is Right* fan, but I thoroughly enjoyed the show.

Honestly, if I were guest host, my type of fun might not be accepted by most others—especially the McMahons. I would show up with a contingent of former WWE wrestlers who should have been given a better chance by the promotion. I'd give most of the WWE guys front row seats just so they could watch, take notes, and interact with the fans in a friendly manner. My matches would feature all squash-type matches pitting the best of the WWE's castoffs against mid-carders who don't deserve to even be introduced by Howard Finkel. It'd be interesting to see what would happen if guys like Colt Cabana, Joe E. Legend, Paul London, and Brent Albright got a chance to wrestle the match they want.

The only two WWE wrestlers who would be on the docket would be C.M. Punk and "American Dragon" Bryan Danielson, who would be given as much time as they wanted to go at it.

Dear Brandi:

You stated a year ago that WWE Divas were happier than the TNA

Photo by Joe Zanolle

If the "Ice Queen" had her way, we might have gotten to see a bit more of Brent Albright on *Raw*. Don't hold your breaths, but someday WWE may call and ask Mankiewicz to come host, and she'll take some top indy guys along for the ride.

Knockouts. Do you still feel this is true? The women's division in WWE is too cluttered and the battle royal at WrestleMania (as everyone seems to agree) was a joke. Meanwhile, Victoria has already won the TNA Knockouts title in her short time in TNA, while, as far as I know, Gail Kim hasn't even had the chance to challenge for any of the two women's title since her return to WWE.

KEVIN
Bookkollektor@aol.com

Dear Kevin,

How is it that you can spell collector so horribly, yet you collect books? Are any of those books dictionaries? Just wondering ...

I have a feeling that the WWE Divas are still more content with their lot in life than the TNA Knockouts. The Divas are still treated better. That's why Gail Kim left TNA for WWE. While that may indeed be an isolated situation, I'd look at future developments. One or two more defections north will tell you all you need to know.

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Though Gail Kim may not have a title belt around her waist, Mankiewicz says she thinks Kim is much happier in WWE.

My Queen,

What is your take on the current status of the NWA (world title or not) heavyweight title? I realize that it does not mean what it used to, but if I were an active singles wrestler, winning the NWA title would be a dream come true and the pinnacle of my career. What do you think?

Also, on a personal note, I think Gino Hernandez would have set the standard as NWA champ.

Respectfully your underling,
CRAIG MADERIC
Catasauqua, PA

Dear Craig,

So you're the one who still cares about the NWA title. Glad to meet you. I didn't think you existed. I thought that title was as dead as Gino.

Letter of the month (taken verbatim from the actual letter to share my torture with all of you)

Hey Brandi

Ive Been A Wrestling Fan Since 1996 And Have Been Watching WWE Ever Since

But Today's Story Lines Are Just Getting Dumb And More Unreal

Like How Rey Mysterio Can Beat The Big Show And Kane

Very Unreal To Me And Also The One Thing That Makes Me And Many People I Know

Very Mad Is The Fact That John Cena Keeps Getting WWE Championship Shot Every 2 Months Of Every Year Since Like 2005 Thats Getting Old And Boring

He Isnt That Great Of A Wrestler To Get That Many Title Shots

And I Mean Im Excited That DX Comes Back But Its Like The 11th Time The Returned Together In Like 3 Years Guess They Ran Outa Ideas To Do With Shawn And HHH

But I Am A Big DX Fan But Id Like To See The WWE Do Diffrent Story Lines And Not Repeat Old Ones They Have Done Like 20 Times Nothing Can Make Me Stop Watching WWE I Just Wanna See New Stuff Not Old Stuff Maybe Have John Cena Go For The IC Belt That Would Be Something New And Put Christian On A Real Show Not A Low Rated ECW And To See Kane Be The WWE Champion Would Be Nice Not ECW Champion Acually WWE Champion

CHRISTIAN RAYNE
christian.rayne@yahoo.com

To Christian,

I guess you've never discovered those newfangled characters called periods. *Oooh*! I just used one! For your benefit, please look back at the word "period" and check out that little dotty thingy found right after the "s" in that word. When one uses periods within their compositions, there is no need to start a new frickin' paragraph for every stinkin' sentence.

As for your disjointed, horribly constructed letter, it seems like you have something in common with the WWE creative teams: lack of continuity and imagination. I think you (and those who work creatively in Stamford, Connecticut) need to rethink your love of wrestling. □

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June 1983: Bob Backlund vs. John Studd: The Untold Story Behind Studd's Raw Deal. Also: Jim Garvin, Bockwinkel-Lawler, Bob Orton Jr.

Nov. 1983: We Sent Hulk Hogan To Cover Bockwinkel vs. Wahoo ... And All Hell Broke Loose! Also: James J. Dillon, Race-Kevin Von Erich, Paul Ellering, Reed-JYD.

April 1984: Rick Steamboat Quits Wrestling! The *Real* Story Behind His Most Painful Decision. Also: Masked Superstar-Mulligan, Adams-Garvin, Barry Windham, Ric Flair.

June 1984: Ric Flair On The Defensive: Is Mike Rotundo Ready To Take The NWA Title? Also: Ted DiBiase, Jim Cornette, Angelo Mosca Jr.

Aug. 1984: Junkyard Dog Joins Jim Valiant's Boogie Woogie Brigade. Also: Steve O-Zbyszko, Magnum-Wrestling II, Austin Idol, Sugar-Spoiler.

Sept. 1984: Rick Martel Dethrones Jumbo Tsuruta: Finally, An AWA Champion To Be Proud Of. Also: Brody-LeDuc, Iron Sheik, Kerry Von Erich, Rock 'n' Roll Express.

Oct. 1984: Collision Of The Florida Musclemen: Can Billy Jack Squeeze Superstar Graham Out Of Wrestling? Also: Road Warriors, Flair-Steamboat, Eddie Gilbert, Orndorff & Shultz-Atlas & Johnson.

Nov. 1984: Dusty Rhodes: Champion Of Champions ... And Still The Lord Of The Ring. Also: Rich-Gilbert, Gino Hernandez, Road Warriors, JYD-Reed.

Dec. 1984: How Hulkamania Trampled Big John Studd. Also: Road Warriors, Magnum T.A., Wahoo McDaniel, Sullivan-Rhodes.

March 1985: He's Back And Better Than Ever: Backlund-A-Mania Is Sweeping The Nation! Also: Koloffs, Billy Jack, Von Erichs-Devastation Inc.

Sept. 1985: A Psychologist Examines "Rowdy" Roddy Piper! Is He As Crazy As You Think He Is? Also: Magnum-Blanchard, Fantastics, Ric Flair, Gagne & Sammartino.

Jan. 1986: Rick Steamboat vs. Magnificent Muraco: The Volcano Rumbles. Also: Warriors & Ellering, Mike Von Erich, Jake Roberts, Koloff & Khrushchev-Rock 'n' Rolls.

June 1986: Barry Windham's NWA Mission: Humiliate Ric Flair! Also: Nord-Road Warriors, British Bulldogs, L. Von Erich-One Man Gang, Tully Blanchard.

Aug. 1986: WrestleMania 2: Hulk Hogan's Night Of Redemption. Also: Jim & Ron Garvin, Steve Williams, Rick Martel, Sir Oliver Humperdink.

Sept. 1986: Dusty Rhodes & Magnum T.A.: America's Team Is Not Out For Glory ... It's Out For Revenge! Also: Andre-Hogan, Chris Adams, Barry Windham, Scott Hall.

Dec. 1986: Rock 'n' Roll Revival: Morton And Gibson Regain The NWA World Tag Title! Also: Lex Luger, Hogan-Adonis, Hall-DeBeers, Baby Doll.

Jan. 1987: The New Roddy Piper: Why The Fans Love Him ... But Why They Should Hate Him! Also: Terry Taylor, Magnum T.A., Rude-Flair, Bam Bam Bigelow.

Feb. 1987: Hogan, Piper, Orndorff: The WWF's Hate Triangle. Also: Terry Taylor, Ric Flair, Midnight Rockers, Kevin Von Erich.

March 1987: Happy Anniversary, Hulk Hogan! The WWF Champion Celebrates Three Years At The Top. Also: Ric Flair, Missy-Gilbert, Lex Luger, Bulldogs, Koloffs.

April 1987: Steamboat & Windham: Manny Happy Returns! Also: Paul Ellering, Hacksaw Duggan, prospects.

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June 1987: Nikita Koloff's Mission: Saddle The Horsemen And Trample Lex Luger! Also: Roddy Piper, Adams & Taylor, Bruiser Brody, Scott Hall.

Aug. 1987: The Superpowers' Super Victory: Dusty Rhodes & Nikita Koloff Win The Crockett Cup. Also: Hulk Hogan, Lane & Cornette, Mike Von Erich, Adams & Taylor.

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Nov. 1987: Special Fan Poll: Should Mr. T Be Allowed To Referee? Also: War Games, Bulldogs, Condrey & Rose, Dusty Rhodes.

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Feb. 1988: A Special Analysis By Jesse Ventura: Randy Savage Has Wimped Out! Also: Sting, R&Rs-Blanchard & Anderson, Kevin Von Erich, Dangerously-Lawler-Dundee.

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Oct. 1989: Dusty Rhodes' WWF Hit List. Also: Hall-Pillman-Vicious, Curt Hennig, Warriors, Terry Gordy, Kevin Von Erich.

Dec. 1989: The Dusty Road Is Paved With Gold: The American Dream Lives On! Also: Ric Flair, Hogan-Zeus, Embry-Chu-hi, Lex Luger, Larry Zbyszko.

Jan. 1990: Why Sting's Friendship Is Tearing Ric Flair Apart! Also: Roberts-DiBiase, Rock 'n' Rolls, Lawler-Embry, Hulk Hogan, Paul E. Dangerously.

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Sept. 1992: Hulk Hogan's "Retirement": Why The WWF Will Never Let Him Rest In Peace. Also: War Games, Big Van Vader, Kamala, Marty Jannetty, U.K.

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Nov. 1992: The Great American Crash: Vader Crushes Sting For The WCW World Title. Also: Ric Flair, Ultimate Warrior, Madusa, Warlord & Barbarian-Bushwhackers, top rope rule.

Dec. 1992: Hey, Ric Flair: Stop Whining And Start Winning. Also: Razor Ramon, Heavenly Bodies, Jeff Jarrett, Windham & D. Rhodes, NWA title.

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PRESS CONFERENCE

Photo by Scot Finkelstein

Sapolsky poses with roster members of his Dragon Gate USA promotion. Sapolsky calls the group, which caters to fans of athletic in-ring action, a "premium wrestling product."

GABE SAPOLSKY

WHEN A TEENAGE Gabe Sapolsky wrote Tod Gordon a letter in 1993 asking for a job in ECW, he never could have dreamed that it would set him on a path to becoming one of the brightest and most influential wrestling minds of our time.

As Paul Heyman's right hand man, Sapolsky would play a vital part in ECW's heyday of the late-1990s. Years later, he would become the architect for one of the most revolutionary wrestling promotions in history—Ring of Honor.

But Sapolsky's tenure as ROH's creative head came to an abrupt end when he was unexpectedly fired in October of 2008. Although he was grateful to Sapolsky for the time and effort he devoted to building ROH, owner Cary Silkin felt it was time to nudge the promotion away from the pure athleticism that had been its trademark and pepper in more colorful storylines and characters.

The firing was a shock to Sapolsky and ROH fans, but Sapolsky took the high road and offered nothing but kind words when discussing his former employer in the media.

Just six months later, Sapolsky would resurface in the sport with a new project—Japanese-inspired independent promotion Dragon Gate USA. Sapolsky envisioned DGUSA as the high-water mark for athleticism in wrestling, and found success right away with packed live events, a pay-per-view deal, and plenty of buzz.

Recently, Sapolsky spoke with **PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED** *reporter Al Castle about his latest venture, his departure from ROH, the prospect of working for TNA, and his thoughts on WWE's athletic quotient.*

Every issue, reporters from PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED will participate in an incisive press conference with a top wrestling star. The questions will be demanding. And the answers will revealthe innermost thoughts of the giants of the sport.

AL CASTLE: You have your first show with Dragon Gate USA under your belt now. Did things go pretty much as you envisioned them?

GABE SAPOLSKY: Our goal immediately was to make an impact and get the fans excited and show that we are something new, fresh, and exciting on the North American wrestling scene. And I feel that we accomplished that. We had that high level of excitement and the crowd was really, really into it from the very beginning. And we kept that going throughout the whole night. People saw that we are, indeed, a premium product and that we are bringing a new style to the United States and upping the athleticism than you're used to in pro wrestling and just presenting an all-around, high-quality, first-class pro wrestling product.

> "Being fired was the best thing ever to happen to me. I was able to fix a lot of things in my personal life that I neglected for Ring of Honor. I'm basically a much happier person now a days, and much better rounded."

CASTLE: When you talk about Dragon Gate USA being a "premium product," I imagine you must be talking specifically about the athleticism. You don't intend to compete with WWE or TNA in terms of production, right?

SAPOLSKY: Yeah, what we're talking about is the actual in-ring product. The thing to note about Dragon Gate USA is that this is not the best up-and-coming talent. These aren't guys who aren't quite good enough for WWE or TNA. We have a talent roster that's based on the top talent from Japan, coming from the Dragon Gate promotion. That's the core of our roster. And the format of our shows allows us to add the very cream of the crop from the United States, such as a Bryan Danielson or a Brian Kendrick or The Young Bucks, who right now are the hottest tag team on the planet.

Now, our production I'm very proud of. We have very good production, especially for our budget. So you're

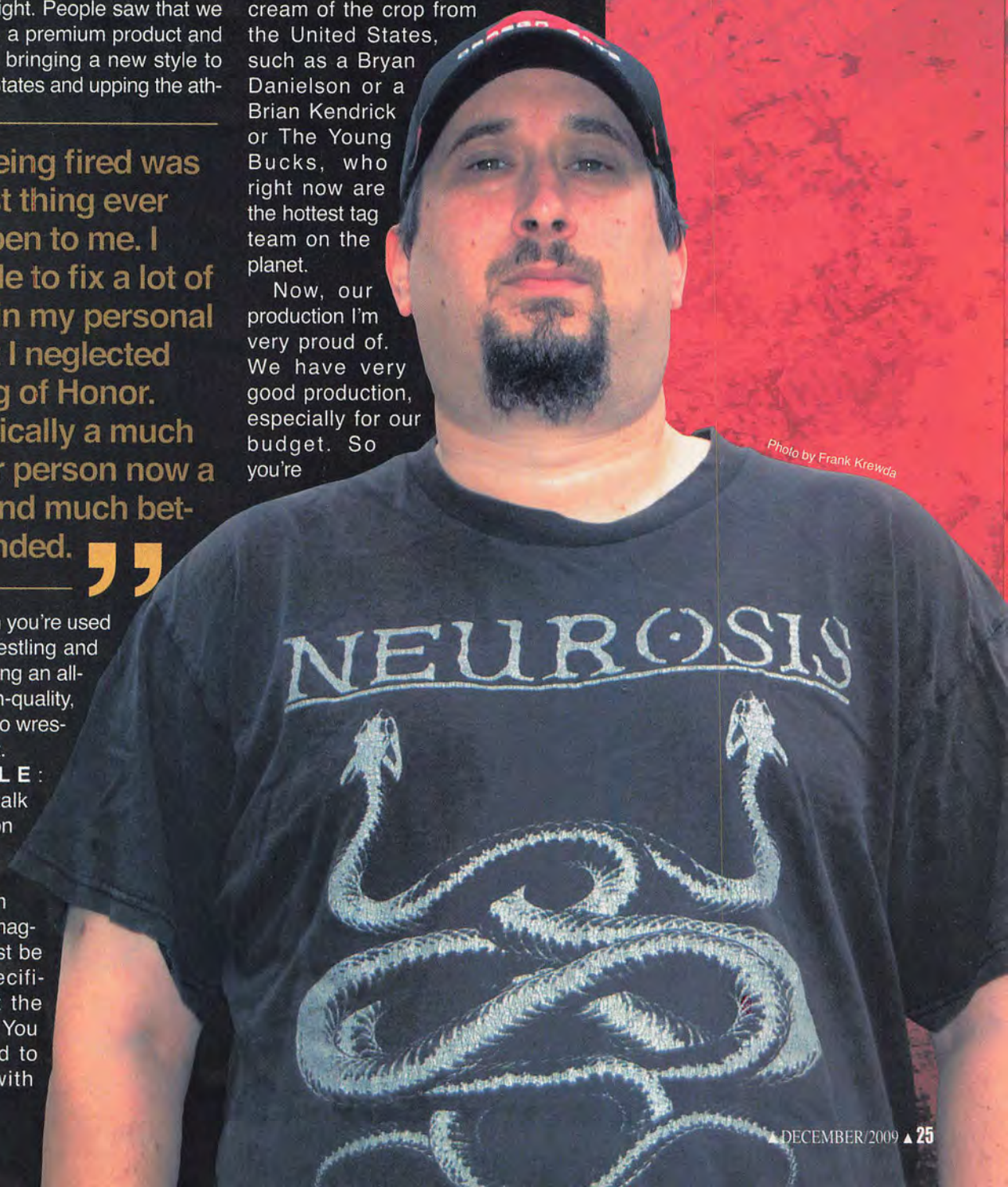

Photo by Frank Krewda

ECW founder Tod Gordon gave Sapolsky his first wrestling job in the early-'90s. Back then, Sapolsky couldn't conceive of working outside the wrestling industry, but these days, while he's content to take Dragon Gate USA as far as it can go, he has considered other options.

not looking at a minor league, indy promotion type budget. But if you're looking for a giant TitanTron and explosions and pyro and tons of lighting and that kind of stuff, it's not going to compete with what WWE is doing. But we still have a product that's very easy on the eyes, very easy to watch. And the action between the ropes, nobody can compete with.

CASTLE: Are you content catering to a niche audience or do you have a long-term goal of growing Dragon Gate USA to become mainstream?

SAPOLSKY: Our goal is to go as far we can. We're not looking to become WWE. We're not a mainstream wrestling product. We are a niche wrestling product. And I think that's how everything in entertainment is these days. You have so much available to everybody all the time, that what you have to do is find your niche in today's world and learn how to live in that niche and make it work financially.

When I was growing up, you had five channels, and if you wanted to watch a sitcom, you had to watch what was on TV at the time. Now you have endless choices all over the place. You have video on demand. You can go on the Internet. You have 200 cable channels. There are options everywhere. So, to me, the idea of having a mainstream product is not going to work in this day and age. You need to find your niche and cater to it. And the Dragon Gate USA niche is the die-hard wrestling fan that wants great athletic action, cutting edge, innovative wrestling, and top talent that is able to wrestle without any politics and with complete freedom. That's the audience that we're going for. If it expands beyond that, then that's great. But we're not going to force it to grow. I think one of the problems with Ring of Honor was that they were a little impatient and the management kind of forced it to grow when I was there instead of letting it grow. And I think that happened with ECW, too, back when I was there.

CASTLE: I know you have said that your split with Ring of Honor was relatively amicable. But are you partly motivated by vindication and showing ROH that your vision for wrestling could work?

SAPOLSKY: Vindication really wasn't a motivation for me. My motivation was basically trying to make a living doing what I love to do and to present great wrestling, because I really do enjoy being part of this community and being part of something special and something that means

Dragon Gate USA's status as a niche promotion allows Sapolsky to bring in exciting independent wrestlers such as The Young Bucks, whose wrestling style may be too intense for fans of mainstream wrestling.

Photo by Joe Zanolle

something to people. I will admit that right now it would be a lot easier for me to leave wrestling and get a real job than it would have been before Dragon Gate USA. I've shown that I was able to land on my feet in wrestling. So now if I choose to leave, it's a choice rather than it being forced on me. So that part is vindicating.

CASTLE: Now having a year to reflect on it, what are your thoughts about how you left ROH?

SAPOLSKY: I definitely needed some time off. There's absolutely no doubt about that. In fact, being fired was the best thing ever to happen to me. I was able to fix a lot of things in my personal life that I neglected for Ring of Honor. I'm basically a much happier person nowadays, and much better rounded. There was no balance in my life with Ring of Honor. It was all Ring of Honor, and nothing else. Now, I've learned the importance of having that balance, and I've achieved it. So I'm in a much better place. I did need time off, but whether it was the right move or not, I'm not really the one to say.

CASTLE: Do you still wish for Ring of Honor to succeed?

SAPOLSKY: I think it's critical that Ring of Honor succeeds. I think right now the entire independent wrestling world and even the entire North American wrestling scene is not in great shape as far as keeping the fans interested. What we need now are more things that keep the fans interested in wrestling and keep them talking and keep their attention. And if Ring of Honor were to fold or disappear, that would be one less thing for the fans to follow and pay attention to.

Then you'd also get the same thing that happened to ECW. You'll have a lot of fans that have invested a lot of time and emotion into Ring of Honor. And if suddenly Ring of Honor disappears and they feel like they invested that time and energy for nothing, they'll just move on to other forms of entertainment. So I think it would be a horrible blow to the entire wrestling scene if anything happened to Ring of Honor, and I wish it only the best success.

CASTLE: You've said you don't see Dragon Gate USA as a competitor to WWE or TNA, but do you see it as a competitor to ROH?

SAPOLSKY: I'll go back to pro wrestling in 1998. I, personally, and a lot of pro wrestlers and every promotion back then made their most money together. ECW, WCW, and WWE all made their most money when the so-called competition among all of them was at its most fierce. It kept the fans interested. It kept the fans emotionally involved. And it made the fans wake up every morning and go check the Internet to see what was happening. So, to me, the more competition there is, it makes everybody better and it creates just a really interesting wrestling scene. And that's what we need right now. As soon as WCW and ECW folded, what happened to the wrestling business?

I'll use a baseball analogy. If the Phillies and the Mets are tied in the standings going into the final week of the season, all the games are sold out, the ratings are through the roof, and everyone is paying attention. If the Phillies have a 20-game lead on the Mets and no one is even close to them, how many people are watching the games in the final week of the season?

CASTLE: When you look at ath-

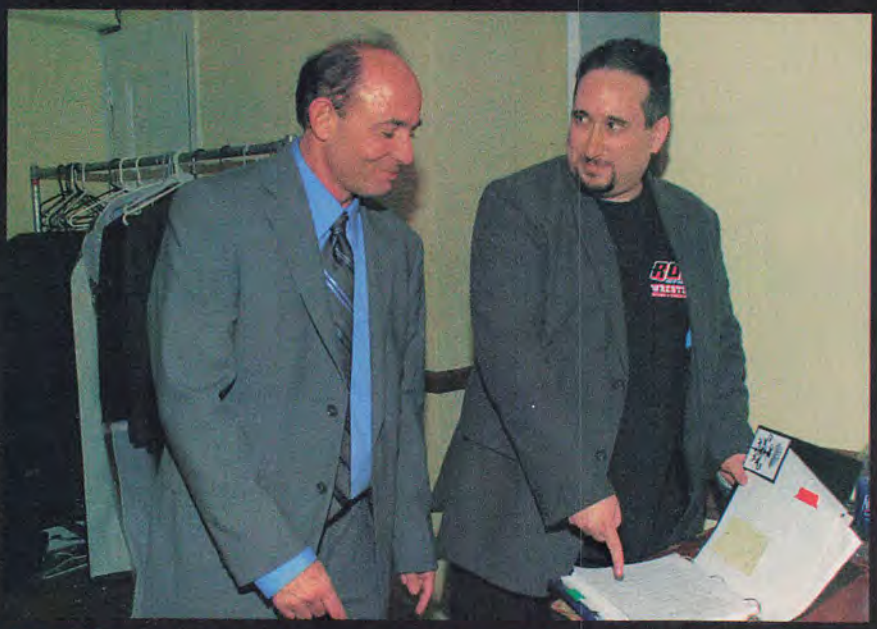

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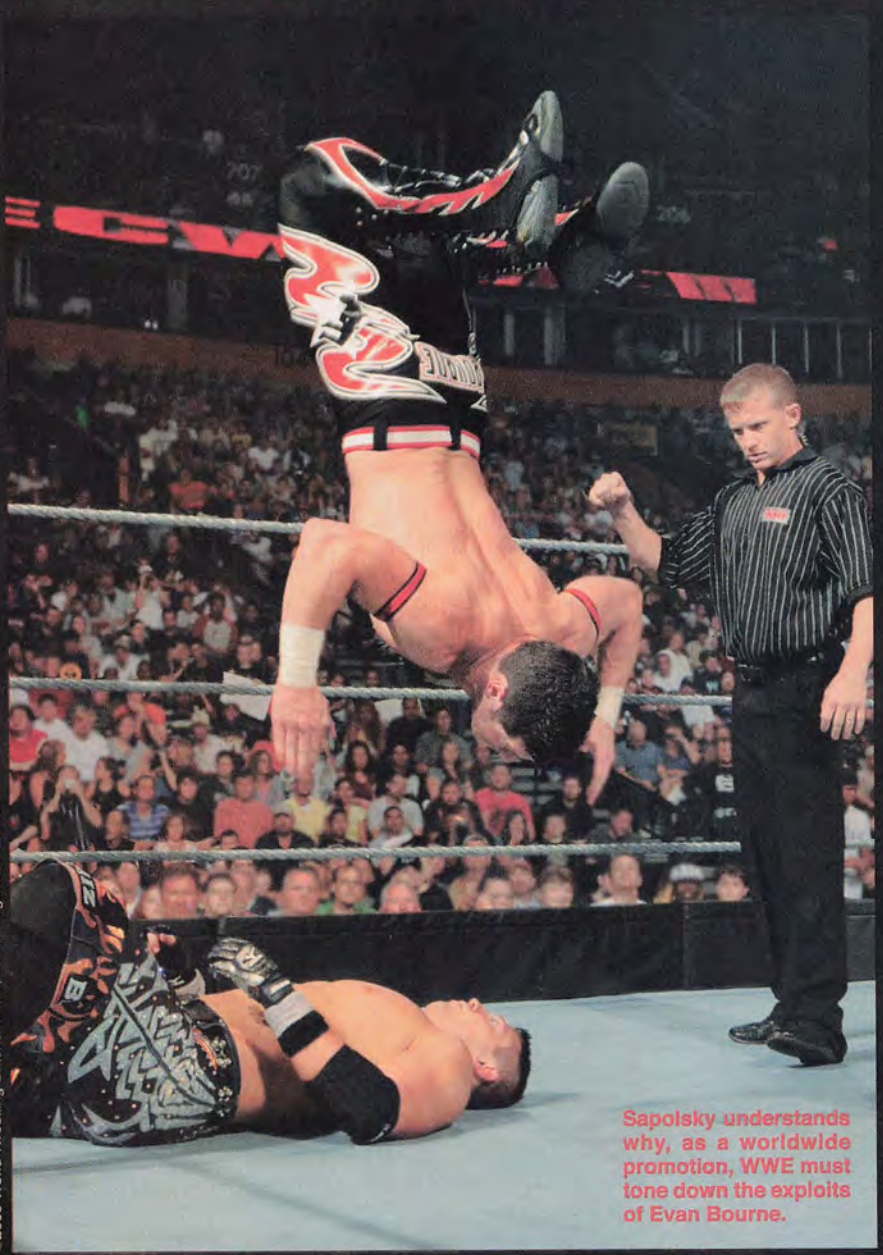
photo by George Napolitano

As head booker for Ring of Honor (above), Sapolsky felt owner Cary Silkin (pictured) and other officials forced the promotion's growth. Sapolsky feels the same thing happened in ECW (below), and is determined to let DGUSA expand at a natural pace.

Photo by Joe Zanolle

The movers and shakers of Dragon Gate USA (from left to right): In-ring talent and commentator Mike Quackenbush, DGUSA President Satoshi Oji, Sapolsky, G-Funk Sports & Entertainment owner Ken Gelman, and Dawn Marie Psaltis Damatta, who served as special guest host of the group's inaugural card on July 25 in Philadelphia.



Sapolsky understands why, as a worldwide promotion, WWE must tone down the exploits of Evan Bourne.

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letic wrestlers like Evan Bourne and Brian Kendrick and WWE limiting what they are capable of, do you feel they're being wasted?

SAPOLSKY No, I completely understand why they do it. WWE is a mainstream product for the masses. And the kind of wrestling that's happening in Dragon Gate USA or that you'd get if you completely unleashed Evan Bourne and let him do everything that he can do, it might not be for the mainstream wrestling fans. It might be too much for them. So WWE does a great job of catering to their audience, which is a mass audience. And in order to do that, you do have to dumb things down.

And they do still let those guys do their thing. I do believe that the WWE product is quietly getting much more athletic these days. You see stuff like what John Morrison does, and when they let Evan Bourne do his thing. I watch *Smackdown* every week and I see dives and innovative moves. So they're slowly getting more athletic, but it's not at the level of what we do at Dragon Gate USA. But the style that we do in Dragon Gate USA might be too fast for some people. You know, the X Games aren't for everybody. And Dragon Gate USA is the X Games of wrestling. So we're going to go full speed, and that might not be something that a 10-year-old kid would be into.

CASTLE: Shifting topics a bit, there's been talk recently about a significant shift in the leadership and creative direction in TNA. Different names of potential candidates to come in and lead TNA in a different direction, including yours, have been floating around. Have you been contacted by TNA and would you be interested in something like that?

SAPOLSKY: They have never contacted me. And I'm definitely interested in anything in life right now. There's nothing I'm not going to listen to at this point in my life. My life has changed greatly in the last year, and my main priority at this point is paying my bills. So I'll listen to anything from any walk of life.

CASTLE: What do you think you

would bring to the table, be it in TNA or anywhere else?

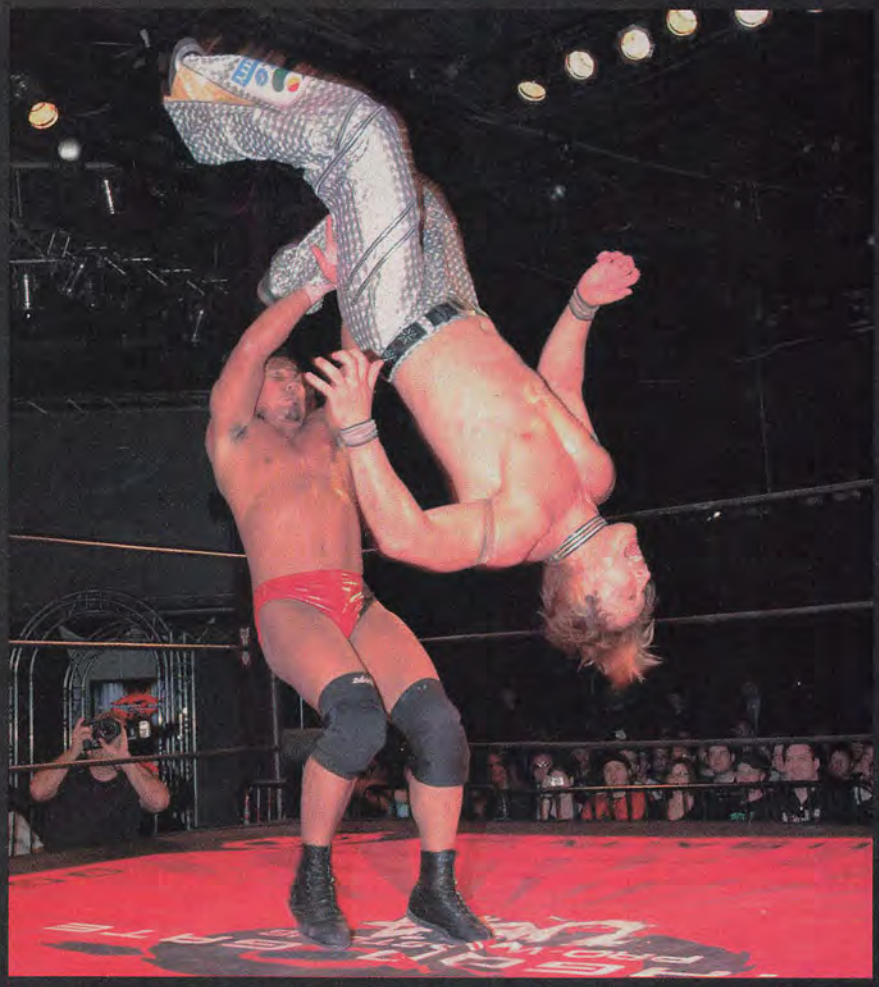
SAPOLSKY: What I do is basically present logical wrestling in a realistic way, and I'm very much in tune to what's prevalent today in society—the latest technologies or whatever people are into these days, the latest fads. That's what I would bring to anywhere I would go.

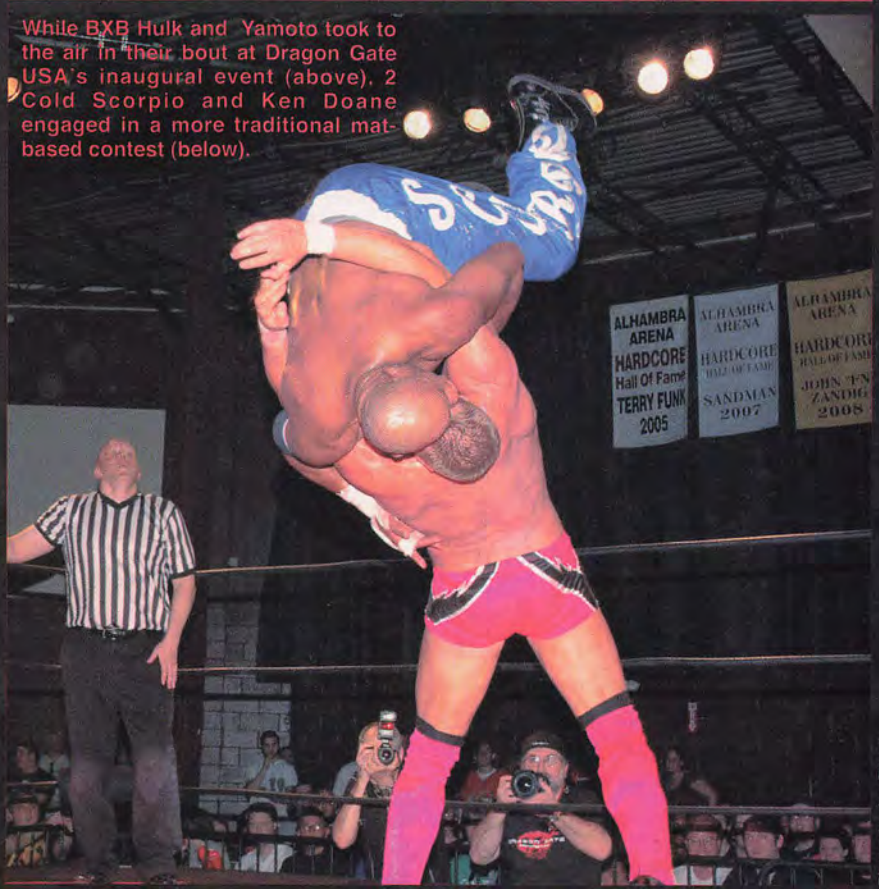
CASTLE: You're still a relatively young guy at 36 years old and potentially still have a long future in this sport. Do you think you'll always be a part of it?

SAPOLSKY: It's hard to tell. Dragon Gate USA might be something that makes money for the next 20 or 30 years. I'm not going to walk away from anything that's making money. I also have other projects in the works. I've kind of reached the point in life that if, in three to five years, I move on and get a marketing job or something like that, it's not something that I dread the way I would have dreaded five years ago. The idea of that was just inconceivable to me. And now, the idea of moving on from wrestling is one that I could definitely see in my future. But at the same time, it's not something that's imminent or something that I'm proactive about doing right now.

Right now, my main priority is getting Dragon Gate USA off the ground. I've had just so much fun doing Dragon Gate USA for the past six months. With Ring of Honor, they told me, "Just stick to the booking. Don't worry about the other aspects of the company." In retrospect, it was a mistake for me not to try to be more hands-on about everything else.

And with Dragon Gate USA, I'm just having a blast handling every aspect of the company and watching it grow. Every week there are small signs of growth. We might do another $100 worth of orders in a week. Or you sign on to Facebook, and you may have added another 30 friends over the course of a week. Or you see more tickets sold. Every week it's been slow, positive growth. And it's been so much fun to be a part of that. □





While BXB Hulk and Yamoto took to the air in their bout at Dragon Gate USA's inaugural event (above), 2 Cold Scorpio and Ken Doane engaged in a more traditional mat-based contest (below).

Photos by Joe Zanolle

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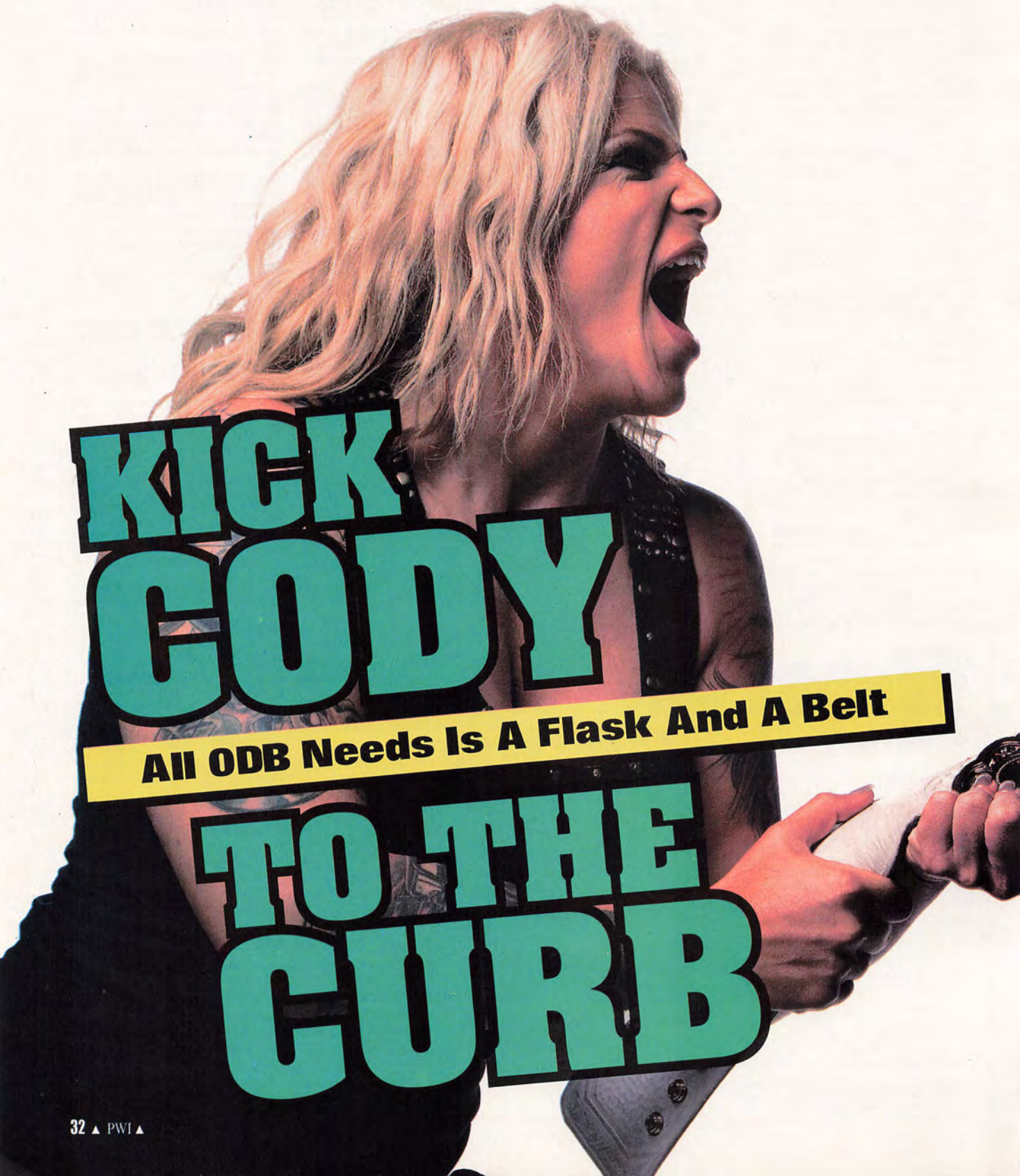
TEXT BY **ERIC COLBY**
PHOTOS BY **LEE SOUTH/TNA WRESTLING**

ANYTIME THE FANS heard glass shatter and the first few bars of "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin's theme music play, they knew two things—Austin was going to raise hell and Austin was taking matters into his own hands.

It was that unapologetic, in-your-face edge that made him one of the most popular wrestlers of all-time.



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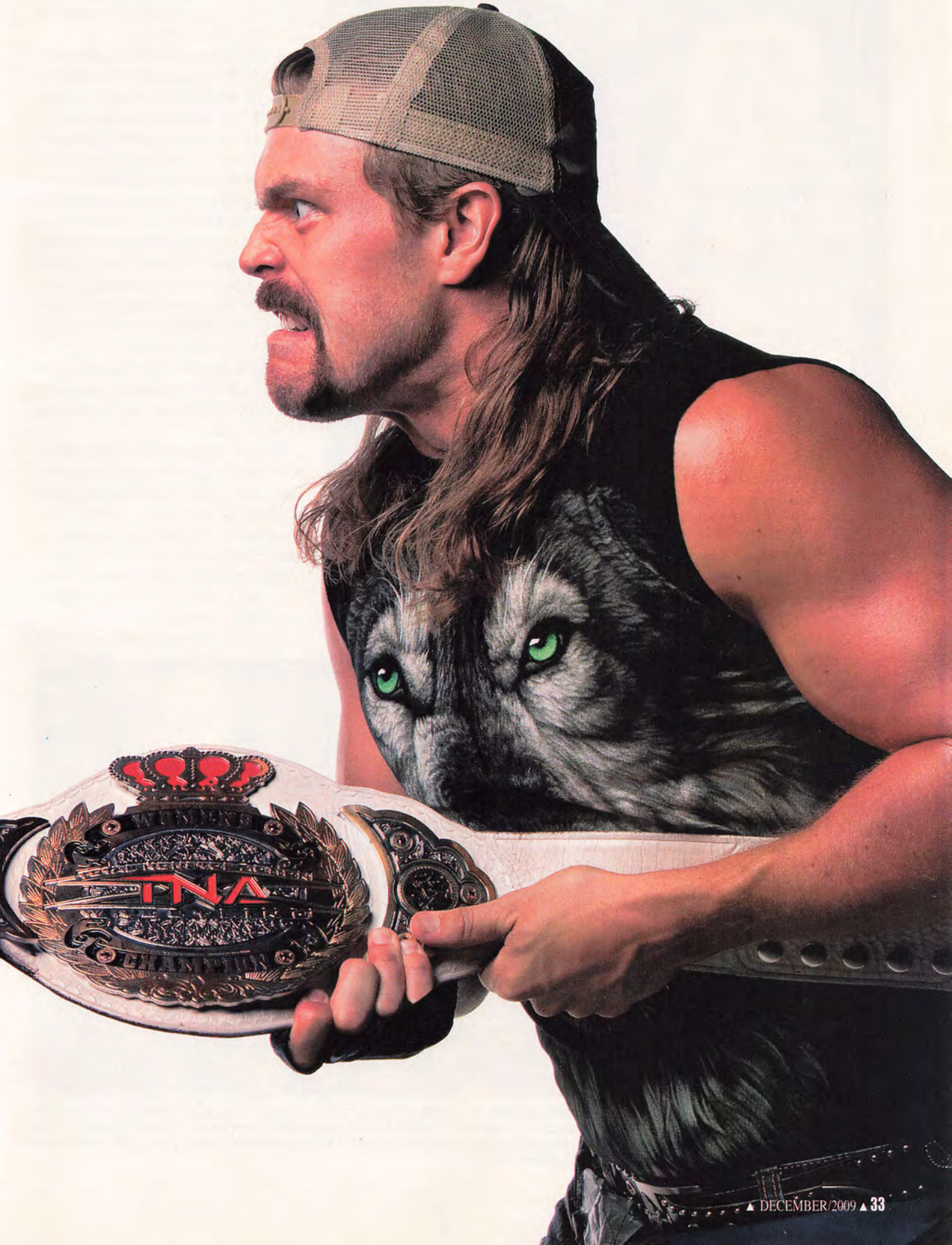
All ODB Needs Is A Flask And A Belt


TNA

ODB's expressive, over-the-top personality (left) has won the hearts of many TNA fans, and conjures up comparisons to "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin (right), whose antics in the late-'90s helped save the WWF.

Down in Orlando, there's another blue-collar, rough-around-the-edges grappler who enjoys a similar appeal. ODB, the boob-grabbin', flask-swillin', butt-kickin' grappler is as in-your-face as any wrestler has ever been, and it's earned her enormous popularity with TNA's fans. It has also earned her her first TNA Knockouts championship ... sort of.

It's true ODB was awarded the title at Hard Justice. However, the fact that Cody Deaner won it by pinning Velvet Sky in a convoluted tag team match, serves as kind of an asterisk to ODB's achievement. That's because Deaner, who earned a place at ODB's side by virtue of winning a TNA-sponsored contest to spend one night with the Minnesota native, found a way to parlay his victory into a romantic relationship with ODB that now threatens her title reign and standing in the sport.

Much like Austin, ODB is at her best when she's riding on the fumes of whatever's in her flask, cracking heads, being politically incorrect, and speaking her mind, which is often crude, rude, and nasty. Though she has enough femininity to rightfully be labeled a Knockout, ODB has ridden unladylike behavior to the top of TNA. Though she occasionally formed partnerships with the other ladies on TNA's roster, they were usually fleeting, lasting long enough to vanquish a common foe or foes.

Enter Deaner, with his mullet, duct tape, and puppy-dog devotion to ODB. To date, he's interfered in countless of her matches and has even cost her several victories. And even though he was instrumental in her getting the title, he now insists that he is the rightful Knockouts champion!

Just as Austin would never have tolerated such meddling, it's in ODB's best interest to ditch Deaner and once again tap into what lurks beneath her massive "pecs" and barely-there skirts. As her success in the Knockouts division prior to Deaner's arrival demonstrates, she gets much better results flying solo, and *not* being so in touch with her feminine side.

"I don't worry about ODB getting soft," opined TNA announcer Mike Tenay, "as much as I worry about that goofball Deaner. He's a pest. He's constantly interfering and getting involved when he shouldn't be. I think getting rid of him would allow ODB to focus on putting together a lengthy Knockouts title reign."

Indeed, the distraction of a love

Deaner appears as if he's about to slug Angelina Love, but, in reality, he's just as likely to embrace her. When it comes to the other Knockouts, Deaner sometimes has trouble keeping his hands to himself. ODB could certainly do without the distraction he represents.

interest vying for your title is enough to compromise anyone's focus. Imagine having to face your significant other in a title match as ODB had to do against Deaner at the No Surrender pay-per-view.

Another aspect in which Deaner's presence hurts ODB is ring time. With so many new Knockouts joining the company, ODB should be honing her skills even further by squaring off with them on *Impact*. Instead, Deaner gets time in the ring against men like Abyss while ODB seconds him like a glorified cheerleader nipping at her flask and shouting encouragement from ringside.

She has also wasted precious training time schooling Deaner on his rural farm, having him chase chickens and haul beer kegs. The time she dedicates to Deaner's "training" is time she would be better served using to strategize and train. All in all, it doesn't portend for a distinguished title run.

Instead of holding on to Deaner, ODB would do much better by letting him go. With her natural abilities and the TNA fans behind her, keeping him around makes little sense.

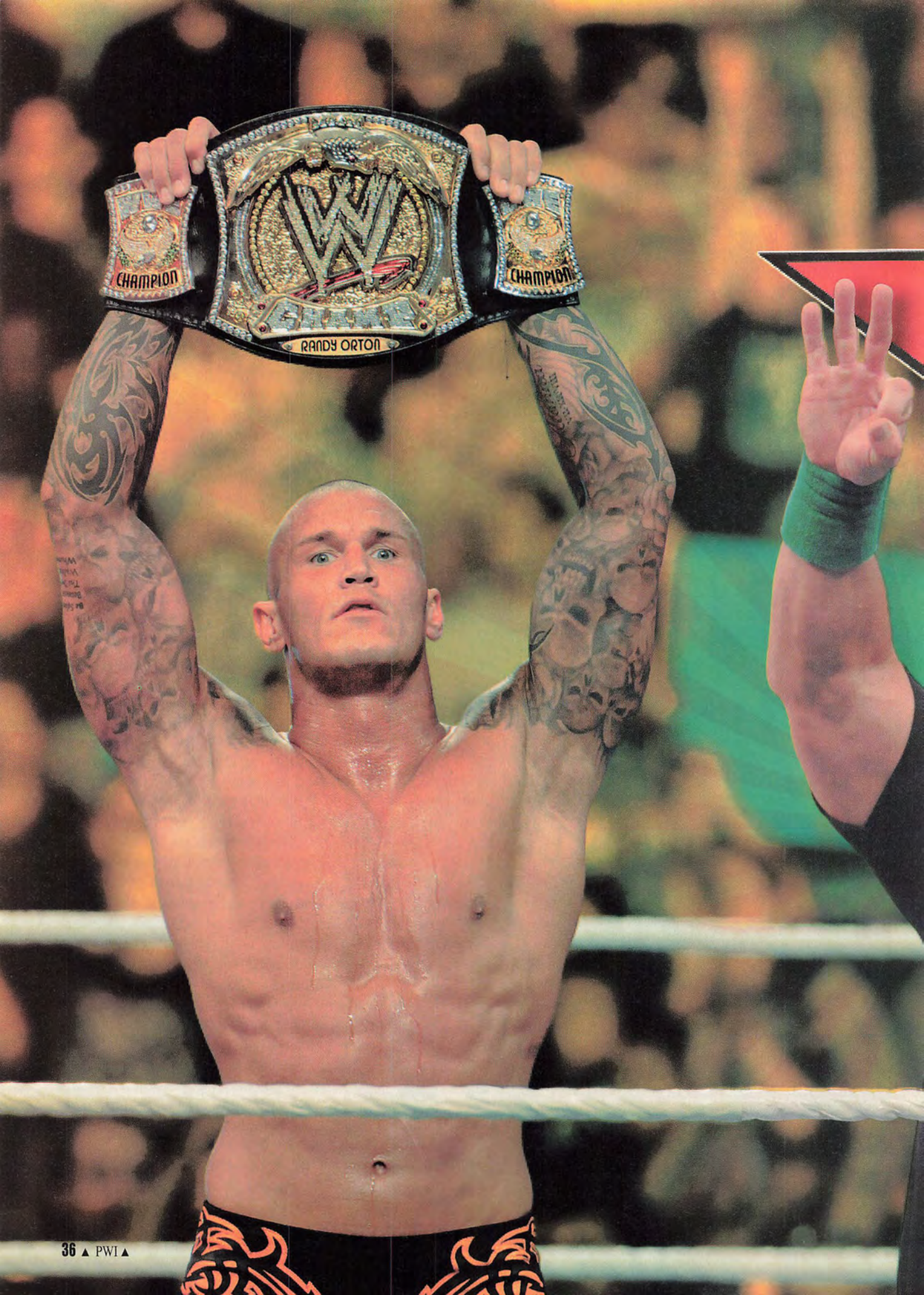
If ODB can't recognize the drain Deaner has put on her career, she should at least recognize how he has embarrassed her as a woman. It's no secret that when it comes to the other Knockouts, Deaner has a roving eye, not to mention hands and lips.

In previous segments on *Impact*, Deaner has planted wet ones on Awesome Kong, Angelina Love, and Velvet Sky. "It was the grossest thing that ever happened to me. Ever," Sky told *PWI*. "I had to brush my teeth, like, 10 times a day for a month, and gargle with Lysol." Then at Hard Justice, Deaner grabbed himself three gratuitous pats on Sky's backside as he scored the pinfall. "That pig violated me at Hard Justice," Sky continued. "ODB totally needs to keep him on a leash."

There are few women who do not regret the one-night stands in their lives. And ODB is most likely lamenting the one night she agreed to spend with Deaner, but unlike those that can put such encounters behind them, ODB must deal with the ramifications of having Deaner in her camp and in TNA.

Fortunately, it doesn't seem ODB is the type to ruminate over past indiscretions, especially those concerning affairs of the heart. If anything, she appears to act first and think second. Now she must act, quickly, to exorcise Deaner from her life.

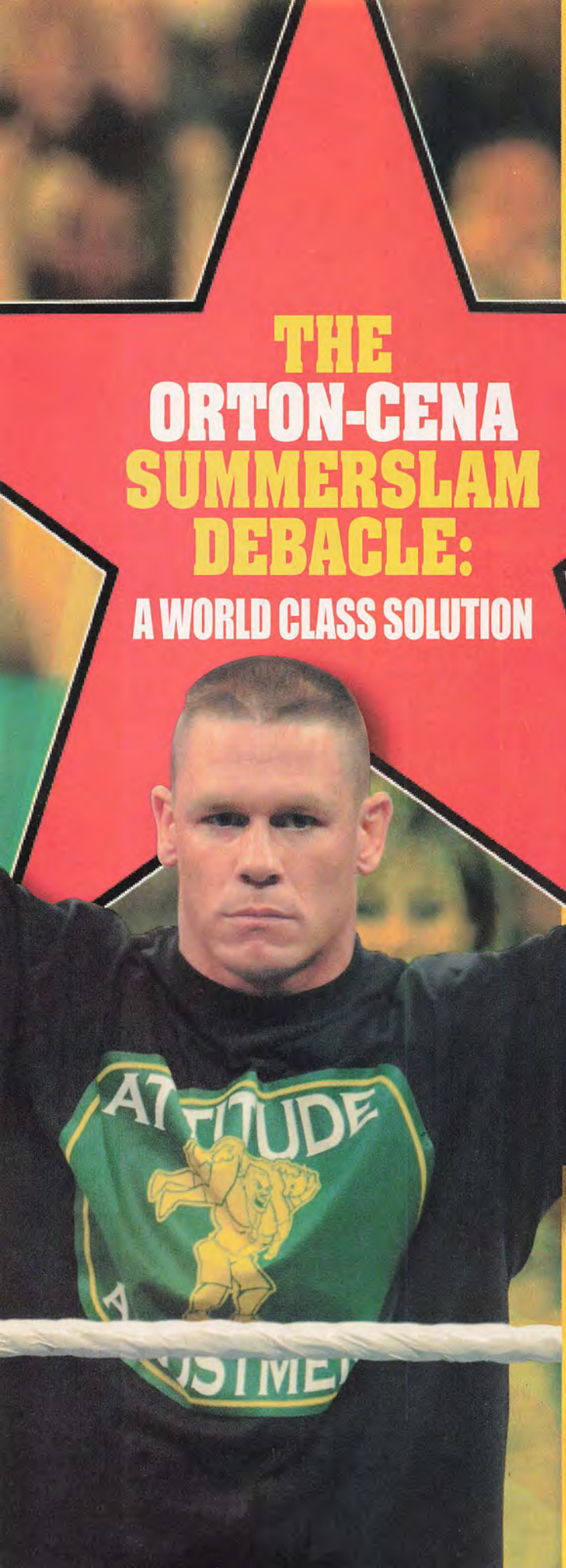
Just as Austin never paraded around WWE with an entourage—or even a manager, for that matter—it is time for ODB to get back to her roots—drinking, cussing, and brawling—all by herself. There is nothing to be gained by continuing to associate with Cody Deaner, but there is a Knockouts title and legion of fans to lose. ODB does not need Cody Deaner or any of the trouble he brings. All she needs is her flask and a belt. □


CHAMPION
CHAMPION
RANDY ORTON

TEXT BY **HARRY BURKETT**
PHOTOS BY **GEORGE NAPOLITANO**

THE ORTON-CENA SUMMERSLAM DEBACLE:

A WORLD CLASS SOLUTION

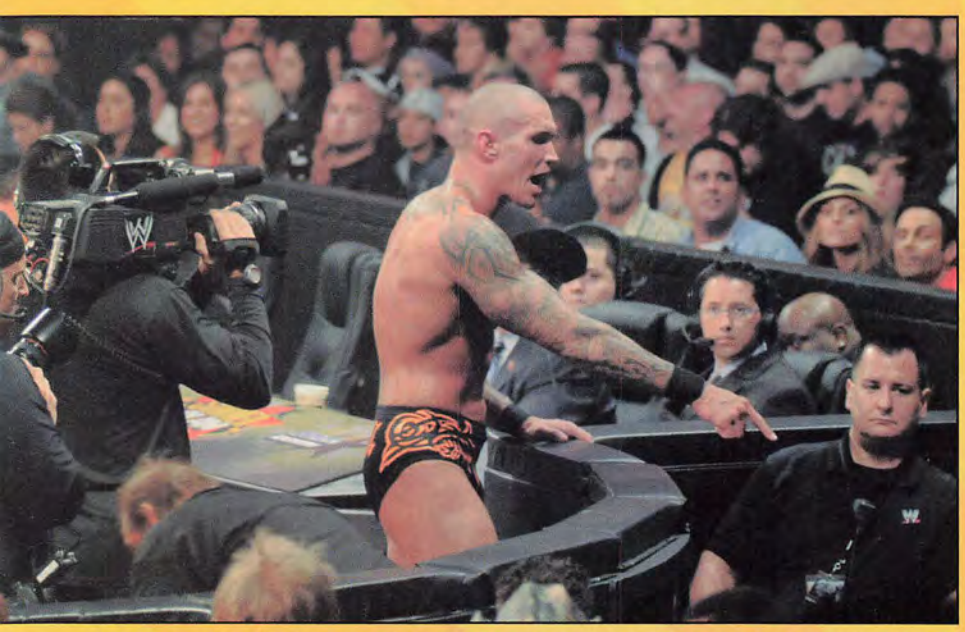


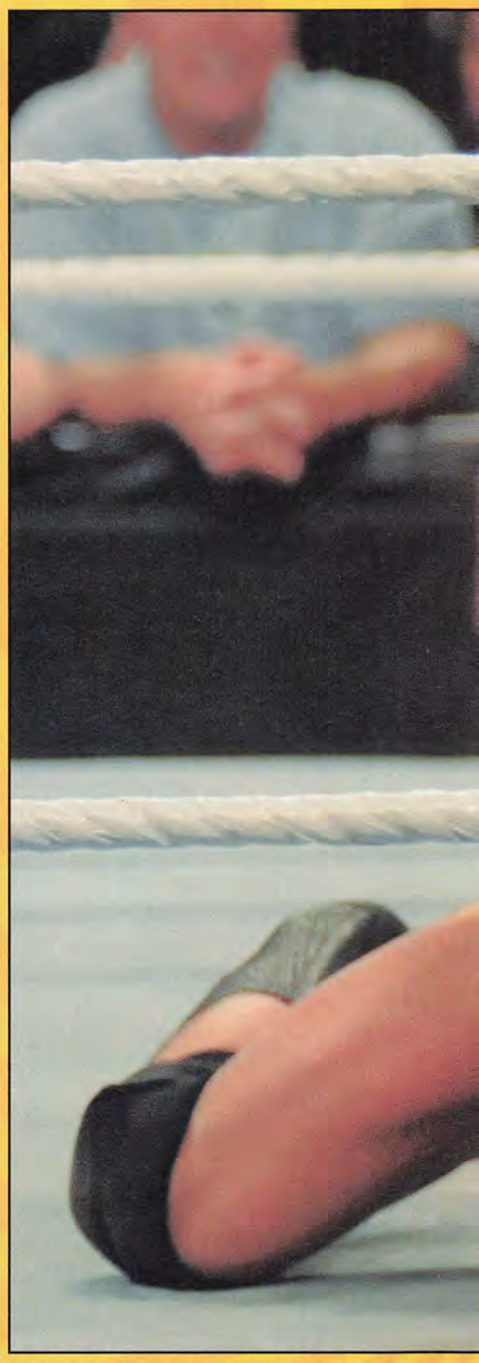
WWE CHAMPION RANDY Orton and challenger John Cena lay on the mat gasping for air as referee Scott Armstrong administered the 10-count. Both men slowly rose to their feet and started trading punches. As Cena got the better of the exchange, Orton popped the referee with a right hand. Assuming that was an automatic disqualification, Orton grabbed his title belt at ringside and headed for the exit.

Ring announcer Lilian Garcia declared Cena the winner and Orton still the champion. Then Lilian announced that WWE Chairman Vince McMahon—through her earpiece—had ordered the match to continue and that Cena would be awarded the title if Orton intentionally got himself disqualified.

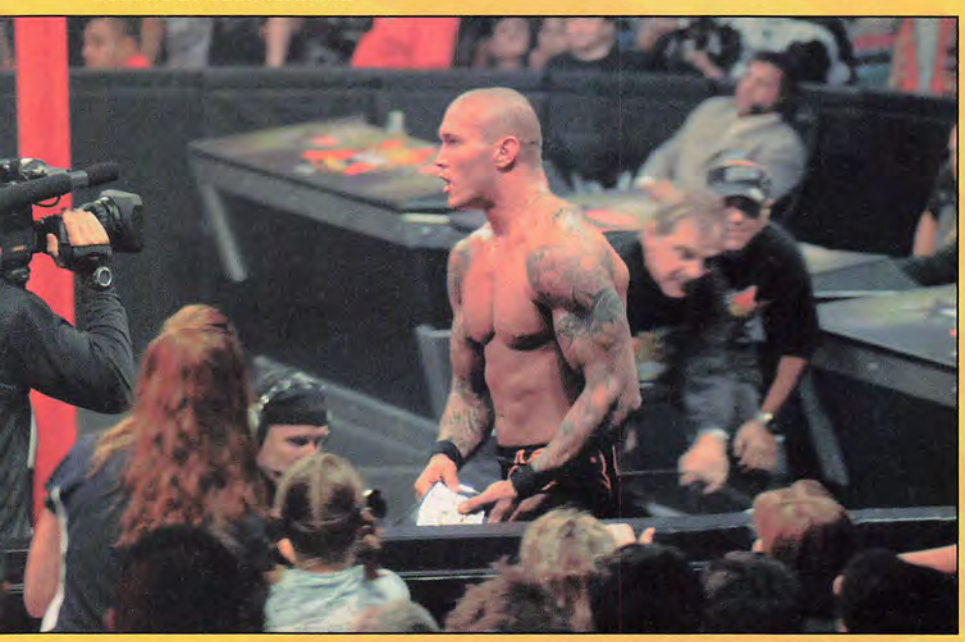
Three minutes later, Orton went for a series of pin attempts, all of which were unsuccessful. Frustrated, Orton once again snatched up the WWE title belt and headed up the entrance ramp, keenly aware that an intentional countout had not been declared off-limits.

Not so fast. Per Mr. McMahon's amended instructions, Garcia announced the match would again continue and that Cena would be declared the new champ if Orton intentionally got himself counted out.





In a deliberate attempt to get counted out and retain his title, Orton walked out of the ring to demand his title belt (above) before heading to the entrance ramp (below). Fortunately, Vince McMahon refused to put up with Orton's cowardly actions at SummerSlam.

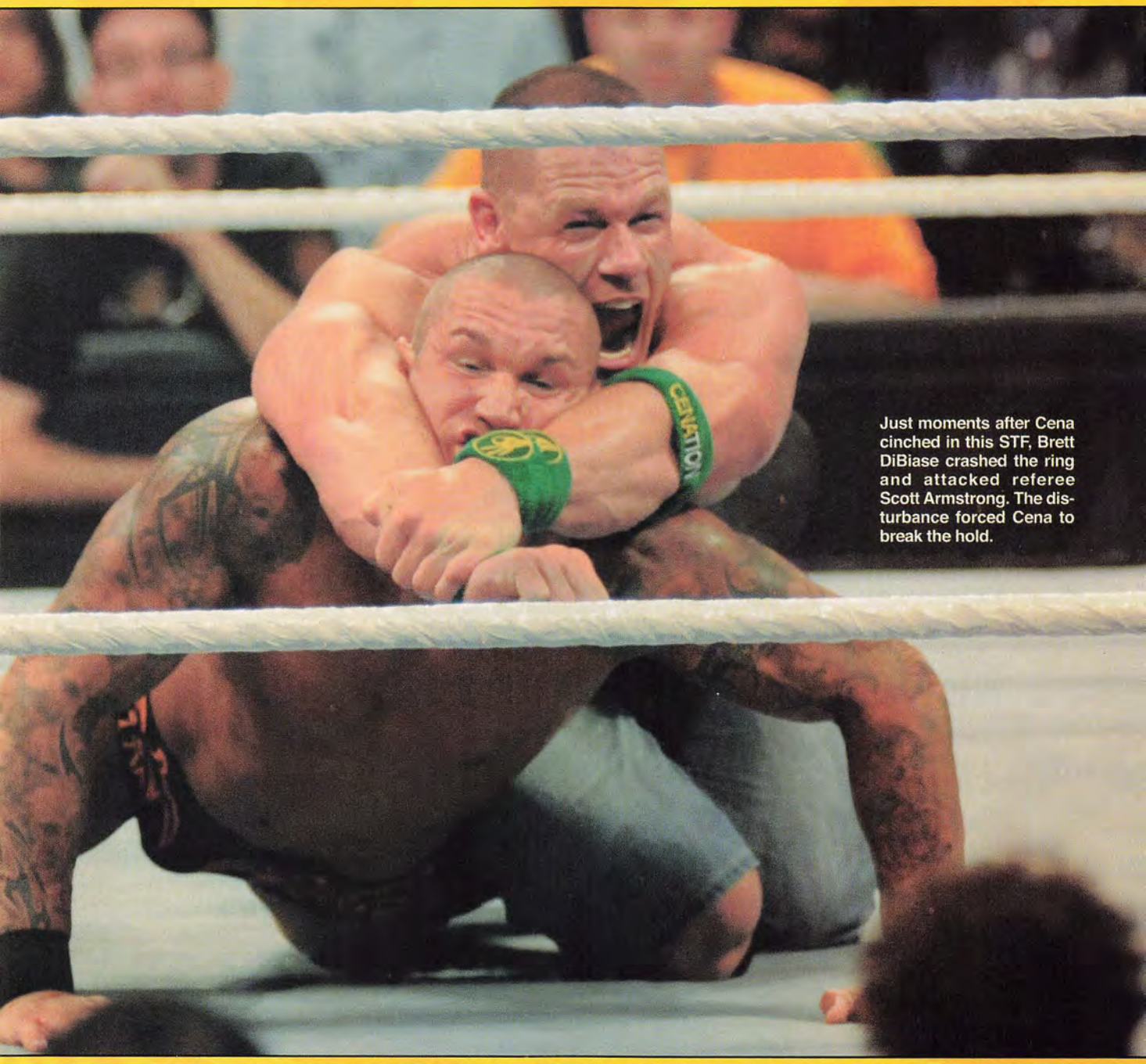


Exhibiting all the self-preservationist tendencies of Ric Flair, Harley Race, and Nick Bockwinkel rolled up into one, Orton caught Cena in a pinning predicament and placed his feet on the ropes for leverage. Referee Armstrong made the three-count. But, after conferring with another official who had run to the ring, Armstrong overruled the pinfall and resumed the bout.

Finally, the championship seemed to be in Cena's grasp when he snared Orton in the STF at the 19-minute mark. A supposed fan in the crowd, later revealed to be Ted DiBiase Jr.'s younger brother, Brett, ran into the ring, distracting the referee and prompting Cena to release the hold. Orton, standing on the ring apron, surprised Cena with an RKO over the middle rope and another RKO inside the ring. After this incredible series of stunts, the champion scored the pinfall and retained his title.

Let's examine how Orton attempted to abuse the rulebook to retain the WWE championship. An intentional disqualification. An intentional countout. His feet on the ropes. Yet Mr. McMahon countered Orton's tactics by restarting the bout each time. If intentional disqualifications and countouts were unacceptable in this case, why are they acceptable in any championship matches?

It is time for WWE to reconsider its policy regarding champions intentionally getting disqualified to save their titles. In what other sport would a champion have the comfort of knowing that getting disqualified is the surest way to preserve his



Just moments after Cena cinched in this STF, Brett DiBiase crashed the ring and attacked referee Scott Armstrong. The disturbance forced Cena to break the hold.

title reign? That would be akin to heavyweight boxing champion Wladimir Klitschko repeatedly hitting challengers below the belt to get the easy disqualification and keep his heavyweight boxing title.

We know the answers to these questions. Pro wrestling gives wide latitude to cheating because heel heat sells tickets. Yet McMahon could not allow Orton to intentionally get himself disqualified or counted out in less than 10 minutes—especially at a major pay-per-view such as SummerSlam—because it would have been a critical disaster. Fans buy pay-per-views to see conclusive finishes. That's why WWE is constantly offering no-disqualification, falls-count-anywhere, and last-man-standing stipulations.

Wrestling simulates other sports. There are two combatants, one referee, one ring. There are winners and losers, champions and challengers. How does this anomaly—a champion being rewarded for breaking the rules—make any sense? If Klitschko brought a sledgehammer into the ring, he wouldn't be allowed to walk away with any of his world title straps—he'd be banned for life!

We propose that WWE—and the entire industry, for that matter—adopt the World Class rule. World Class Championship Wrestling offered a number of justifications for seceding from the NWA back in 1986, but one of the more salient points was Ric Flair's tendency to save his World title by disqualification whenever facing local talent, namely the Von Erichs. WCCW

The World Class Rule:
WHAT IT MEANT TO WRESTLING

Many claimed World Class Championship Wrestling's 1986 secession from the NWA was symptomatic of the Texas ethos: the yearning for independence. The reality was much simpler than that.

Fritz Von Erich's regional outfit had become an international force, with live events and TV deals around the globe. The problem was that he wanted one of his sons to represent WCCW as a world champion ... and the Carolinas-based Jim Crockett Promotions wasn't about to allow Von Erich to control the NWA World title.

WCCW's public justification for leaving the NWA was RicFlair's abuse of the disqualification rule, which often enabled the "Nature Boy" to retain the title through foul means. As a result, all World Class titles would be allowed to change hands by DQ. World Class had experimented with the rule for years, dating back to Kerry Von Erich's NWA World title victory over Flair at Texas Stadium in 1984.

Though seemingly progressive, the rule did have some unintended consequences. World Class referees Bronco Lubich, David Manning, and Rick Hazzard were no longer the invisible third men in the ring. They became integral parts of the match. Wrestlers and commentators often questioned their willingness—or unwillingness—to disqualify champions. Also, because heel champions no longer had the option of getting disqualified, they relied more on outside interference, even at the risk of getting caught and paying the ultimate price.

Overall, however, enabling titles to change hands on a disqualification didn't affect the in-ring action very much. Champions simply adapted their styles. In fact, the rule was implemented only once, when Tony Atlas beat Bam Bam Bigelow by disqualification for the TV belt. "The fact that it was rarely needed proved how effective it was," World Class fan Thomas McGovern told *The Wrestler* in 1987, one year after the rule went into effect.

Flair never minded a DQ loss

Most fans believed the new rule had an overall positive impact, so why didn't it catch on throughout the sport? The reason is the rule was too closely associated with World Class' declining years. But now that World Class is enjoying a zenith, thanks to its newfound exposure on WWE 24/7, maybe Vince McMahon will consider resurrecting one of the promotion's greatest innovations.

—Harry Burkett

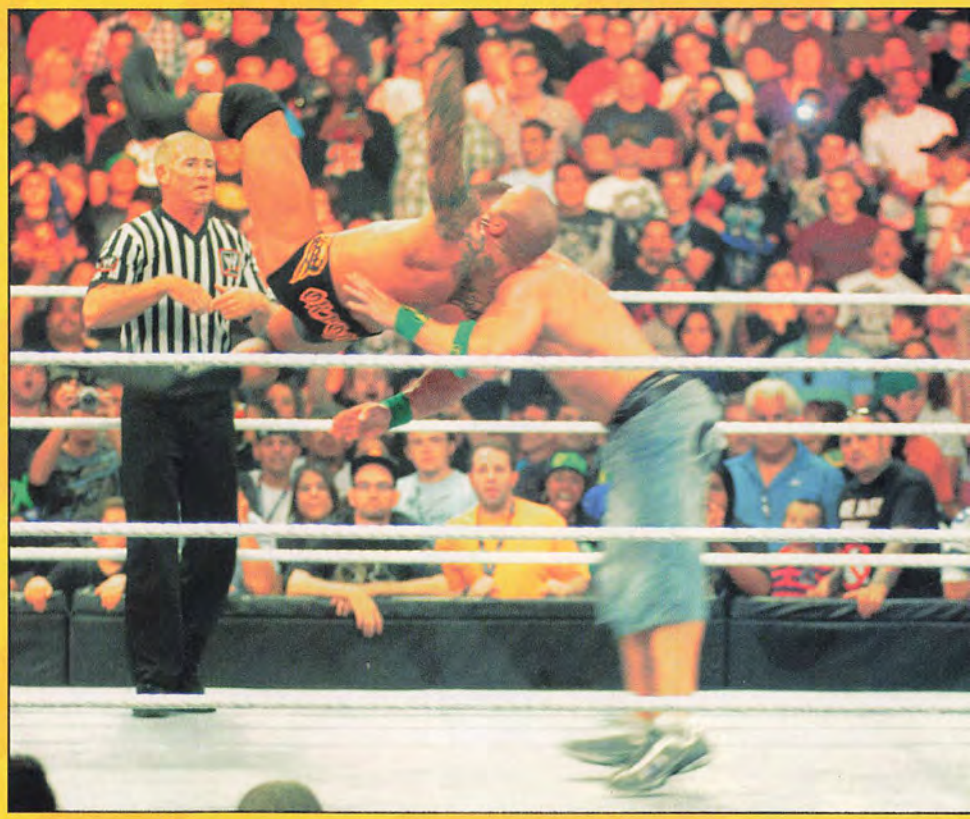
declared that its heavyweight title would be allowed to change hands by DQ. Although the World Class heavyweight championship never rose to world-title status as recognized by *PWI*, inaugural champion Rick Rude—because he was held to a higher standard inside the ring—had instant bragging rights over Flair.

Yet there have always been discrepancies in the rules among various promotions. Years ago, the NWA and AWA champions were able to get themselves disqualified simply for flipping their opponents over the top rope. WCW didn't scrap that rule until the mid-1990s. That allowed rulebreaking champions such as Race, Flair, and Bockwinkel to keep their belts night after night. On the other hand, wrestlers did not get disqualified for tossing their opponents over the top rope in the WWF. That's one reason heel champions didn't last long in the WWF.

"Wrestling has changed a lot since the '80s," commented ex-WWE referee Tim White. "In some ways, the World Class rule would be far more applicable today. Champions don't get themselves disqualified as often anymore, so it really sucks when it does happen. Today's champions have to be concerned with not only keeping their belt, but also their spot. Flair tossing his challenger over the top in every town on the circuit worked in the old days because he was facing a different crowd each time. Today, the same large group of fans is watching every one of Orton's important title defenses on television and pay-per-view. That means he can't get away with cheap DQ saves. Vince wouldn't tolerate it, as we saw at SummerSlam."

Indeed, Orton's title defense against Cena at SummerSlam seemed like a throwback. Why didn't Orton dust off his father's cast, The Iron Sheik's loaded boots, or Mr. Fuji's salt packets while he was at it? If such loopholes have the potential to hurt PPV buys and

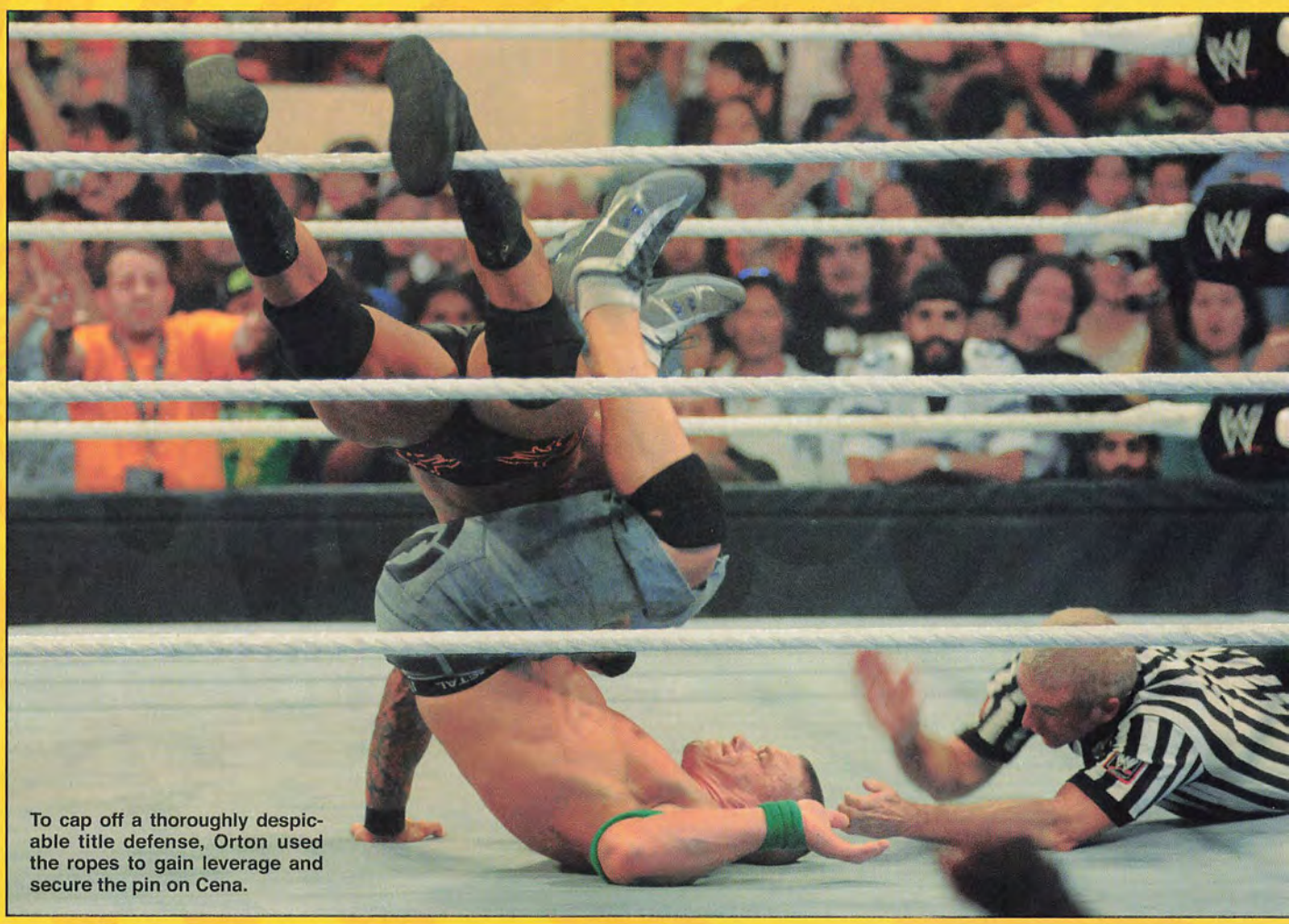
DiBiase's interference allowed Orton to nail Cena with a pair of RKOs that ultimately sent the challenger away unsuccessful.



even house-show attendance, then why not get rid of them?

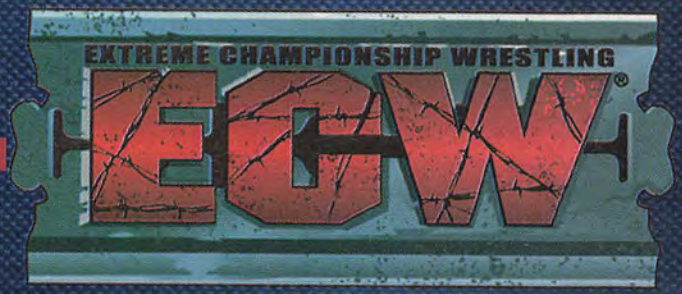
"We were ahead of our time in World Class," said former WCCW referee David Manning. "I didn't feel we were instituting a new rule, but eliminating something that shouldn't have been there in the first place. Flair took abuse of the disqualification loophole to a whole new level. I remember one weekend in Fort Worth when Flair saved his belt by DQ against Kerry, Kevin, and Lance Von Erich in separate matches. Fans always feel cheated when that happens. Quite frankly, I'm surprised WWE is still doing it."

Indeed, if World Class had the foresight to eliminate such ridiculousness 23 years ago, why can't WWE do it in 2009? □



To cap off a thoroughly despicable title defense, Orton used the ropes to gain leverage and secure the pin on Cena.

THE 2009
5
WAY
FACE-OFF!



THERE IS NO question that WWE is the leader of the wrestling industry. That fact hasn't even been questioned for well over a decade.

Because WWE is so vast and so far ahead of its nearest competitors in terms of revenue, resources, and prominence, it's almost impossible to make an objective comparison between the Stamford-based juggernaut and any so-called rival. But thanks to the brand extension split and the creation of a separate ECW brand, WWE has divided its talent among three unique brands, making it a bit easier to at least compare the stars of the three WWE brands with the top stars of TNA and ROH.

In our annual "Five-Way Face-Off," we compare those five brands—Raw, Smackdown, ECW, TNA, and ROH—in a variety of categories. Our goal isn't to determine which brand/promotion is "best" and which is "worst." It is, however, an interesting examination on the current status of each of the five brands, as well as an evaluation of some of the strengths and weaknesses of each.

To get an accurate gauge of each promotion/brand, we assessed them based on roster strength, announcing talent, and overall business outlook. We then assigned a point-value based on how each promotion fared, with a first-place ranking earning five points and a 5th place ranking earning one point.

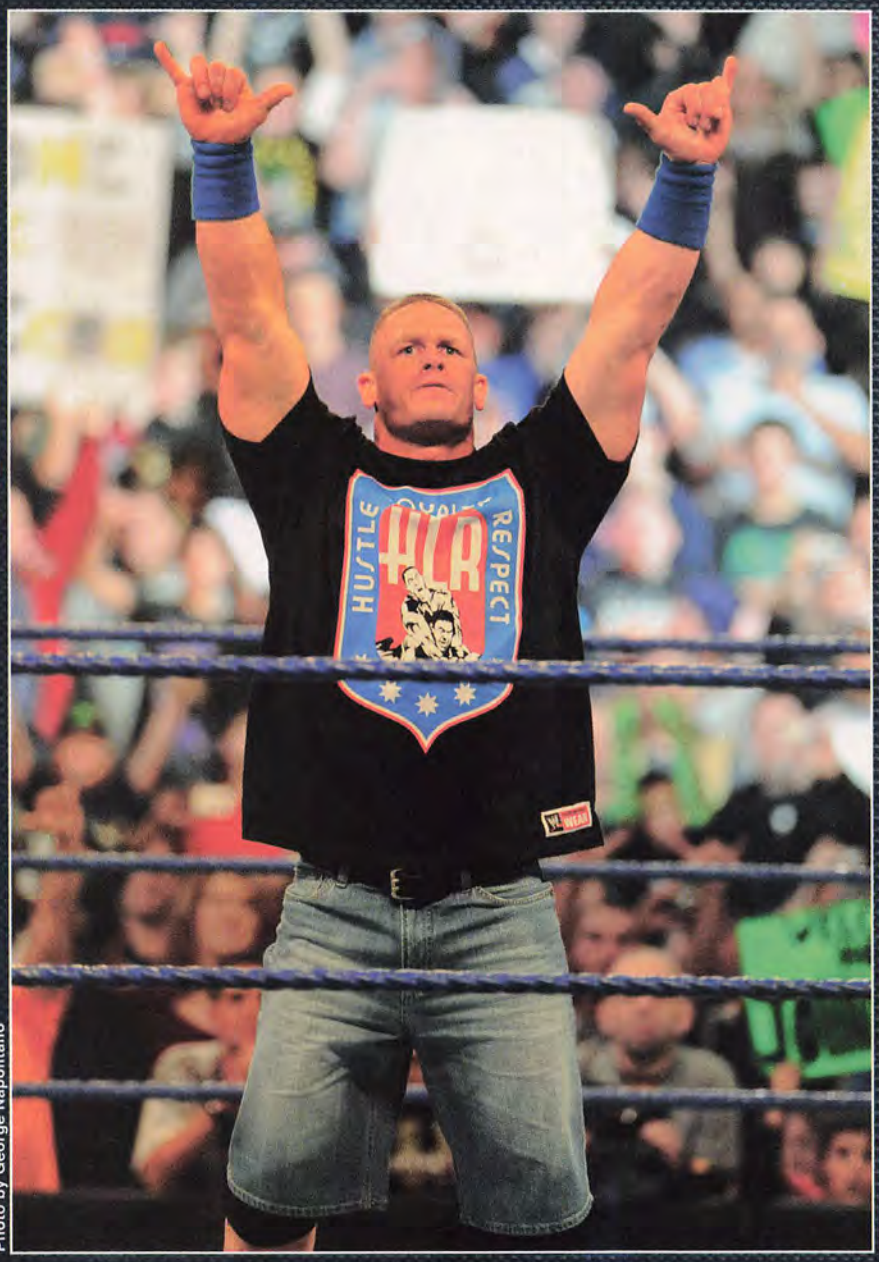


Photo by George Napolitano

Being the top man on the top brand isn't bad. Just ask John Cena. Cena has helped Raw maintain its stance atop the top five divisions in wrestling over the past year.

OVERALL SINGLES ROSTER

Beginning on page 50, we evaluate the top 15 competitors in each promotion and compare them head-to-head in a variety of categories. You can read our assessments in detail in that section, but here's a quick summary of what we discovered.

Just as they were in the 2008 "Face-Off," Raw and TNA were again neck-and-neck, with each company earning five wins in head-to-head comparisons. Ring of Honor came in third with three wins, followed by Smackdown with two. For the third consecutive year, ECW pulled up the rear, earning no wins.

Rank: (tie) 1) Raw and TNA; 3) ROH; 4) Smackdown; 5) ECW. [Last year: (tie) 1) Raw and TNA; 3) ROH; 4) Smackdown; 5) ECW.]

TAG TEAMS

WWE's decision to unify the Raw and Smackdown tag team championships has made it more difficult to evaluate the five brands separately, but it is a promising indication that WWE is finally getting serious about promoting tag team wresting. For several years now, WWE has virtually ignored its tag team divisions, with tag title matches rarely featured on pay-per-views.

Carlito and Primo Colon unified the Raw and Smackdown titles at WrestleMania, but the team fell apart a short time later. The team of Chris Jericho and Edge was a dream team on paper, but Edge's injury cut them off before they could get started. Jericho and The Big Show have gelled into an impressive team, though they are far from cohesive. They're two singles wrestlers that have joined together for a common purpose.

TNA has a reputation as a haven for tag teams, and with stellar duos like Team 3-D, Beer Money Inc., The Motor City Machine Guns, and the underrated British Invasion—to say nothing of the champions, Booker T and Scott Steiner—it's impossible to deny that TNA puts a higher priority on tag wrestling. The company is even launching a Knockouts tag title!

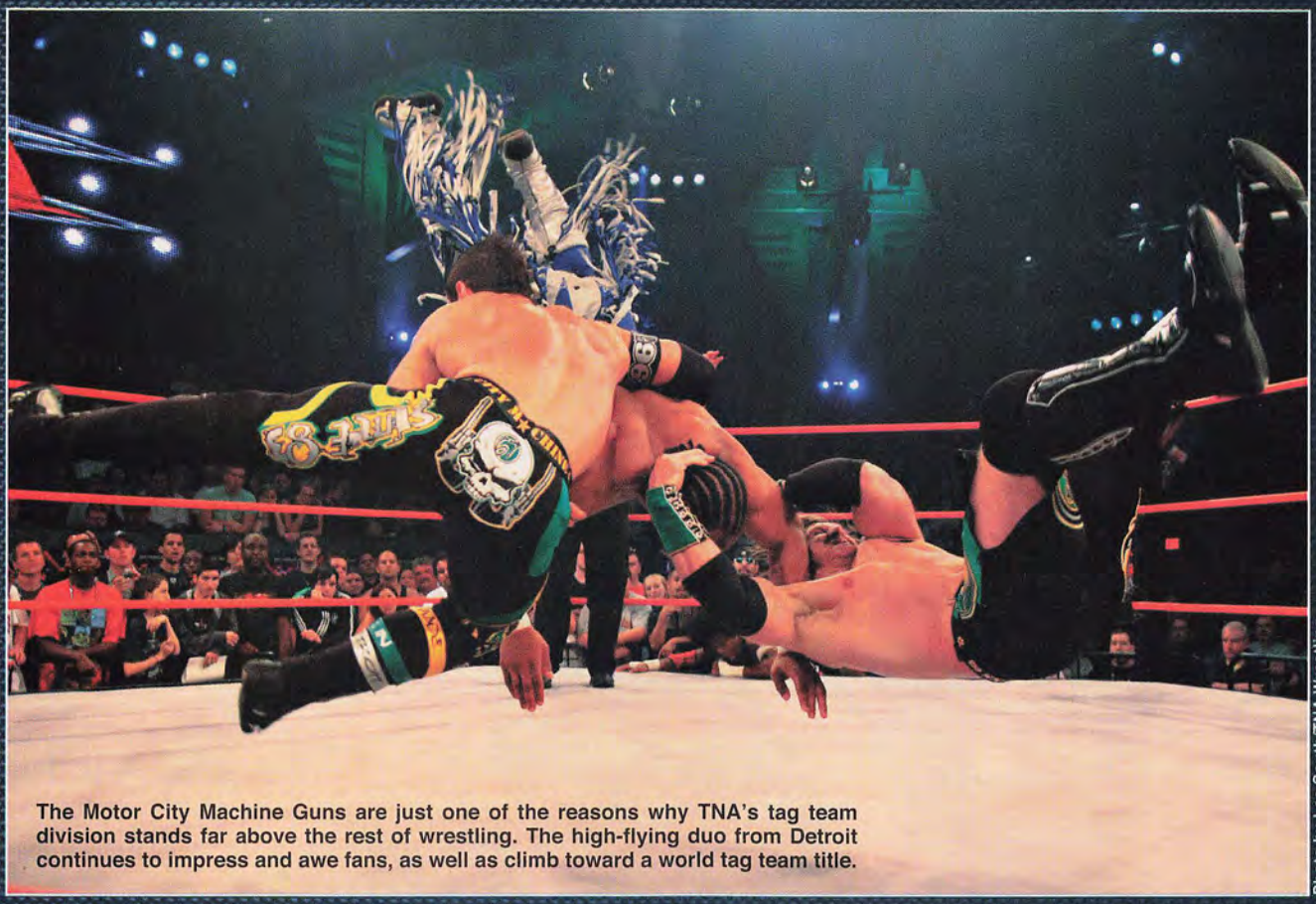
ROH has an impressive tag division, and The American Wolves are one of the finest tandems in the sport.

ECW only regularly features the team of Vladimir Kozlov and Ezekiel Jackson and doesn't recognize its own tag title, so it doesn't fare well in this category.

Rank: 1) TNA; 2) ROH; 3 (tie) Raw/Smackdown; 4) ECW. [Last Year: 1) ROH; 2) TNA; 3) Raw; 4) Smackdown; 5) ECW.]

WOMEN

WWE made a big step last year when the Smackdown brand instituted the Divas championship, but while the company now recognizes two women's titles, it never made a concerted effort to recruit more females to compete for those titles. There are still only four or five women contending for each championship, and neither championship has been



The Motor City Machine Guns are just one of the reasons why TNA's tag team division stands far above the rest of wrestling. The high-flying duo from Detroit continues to impress and awe fans, as well as climb toward a world tag team title.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

prominently featured on either brand in recent months.

TNA, on the other hand, brought in two of the hottest talents on the independent circuit in Alyssa Flash and Sarita. TNA didn't stop there, recruiting Hamada from Japan, signing former WWE Women's champion Tara, and instituting a new Knockouts tag team title. In fact, TNA's Knockouts division is so strong that there has been talk of TNA launching a separate Knockouts TV show. The Knockouts consistently draw the highest ratings of *Impact* and are a vital part of TNA.

Again, ECW doesn't recognize a separate women's title. ROH occasionally features spectacular women's bouts, and has a sister promotion in SHIMMER, which regularly features the best female grappling in the U.S. However, since SHIMMER is technically a separate promotion, ROH does not get credit for its women's roster.

Rank: 1) TNA; 2) Raw; 3) Smackdown; 4) ROH; 5) ECW. [Last Year: 1) TNA; 2) Raw; 3) Smackdown; 4) ROH; 5) ECW.]

BROADCASTERS

The WWE front office must have hoped that moving Jim Ross from *Raw* to *Smackdown* would give Michael Cole a chance to step into J.R.'s shoes and establish himself as the new play-by-play voice of the Raw brand, but it certainly hasn't gone smoothly. Cole is a decent commentator who can call a match while recapping angles and promoting PPVs, but he and partner Jerry Lawler have little chemistry. They also have an annoying habit of laughing at every corny joke John Cena makes and over-hyping matches and interviews.

Both Mick Foley and Taz have talked openly about being "fed" lines in their earpieces as they were giving commentary, and Cole and Lawler sometimes come across as simply spouting off company lines instead of genuinely reacting to the matches in front of them.

Ross has slipped a bit, too, moving from his forte of play-by play to color commentary. Ross and Todd Grisham have a bit more chemistry, but Grisham is wary of stepping on Ross' toes and Ross is not cut out to be a color commentator.

Matt Striker takes the prize as the most insightful and consistently entertaining announcer on any WWE brand. He and partner Josh Matthews call the matches, are know-ledgeable about moves and wrestling history, and have believability and a genuine chemistry.

Ring of Honor's Dave Prazak is an immensely knowledgeable and insightful commentator and has a good back-and–forth rapport with partner Bobby Cruise. TNA's long-time pairing of Mike Tenay and Don West was recently broken up, and it's still too early to get a feel for Tenay and Taz at this point.

Alissa Flash is just one of TNA's key female pickups over the past year. By continually giving its Knockouts a chance to shine, TNA's female division has pulled very far ahead of the competition.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Rank: 1) ECW; 2) ROH; 3) Smackdown; 4) Raw; 5) TNA. [Last Year: 1) Raw; 2) ECW; 3) ROH; 4) Smackdown; 5) TNA]

BUSINESS OUTLOOK

Don't expect any changes to the status quo; our results are the exact same as last year. As it has been for nearly a decade, *Raw* is still the most widely watched wrestling program in the country. *Smackdown* survived the move to MyNetworkTV, though its ratings did drop a few tenths of a point, even as the television show was garnering critical praise for consistently excellent bouts featuring C.M. Punk, Jeff Hardy, Rey Mysterio, and John Morrison.

TNA is still competing with ECW when it comes to television ratings, and Ring of Honor is just trying to survive on the outpost of HDNet.

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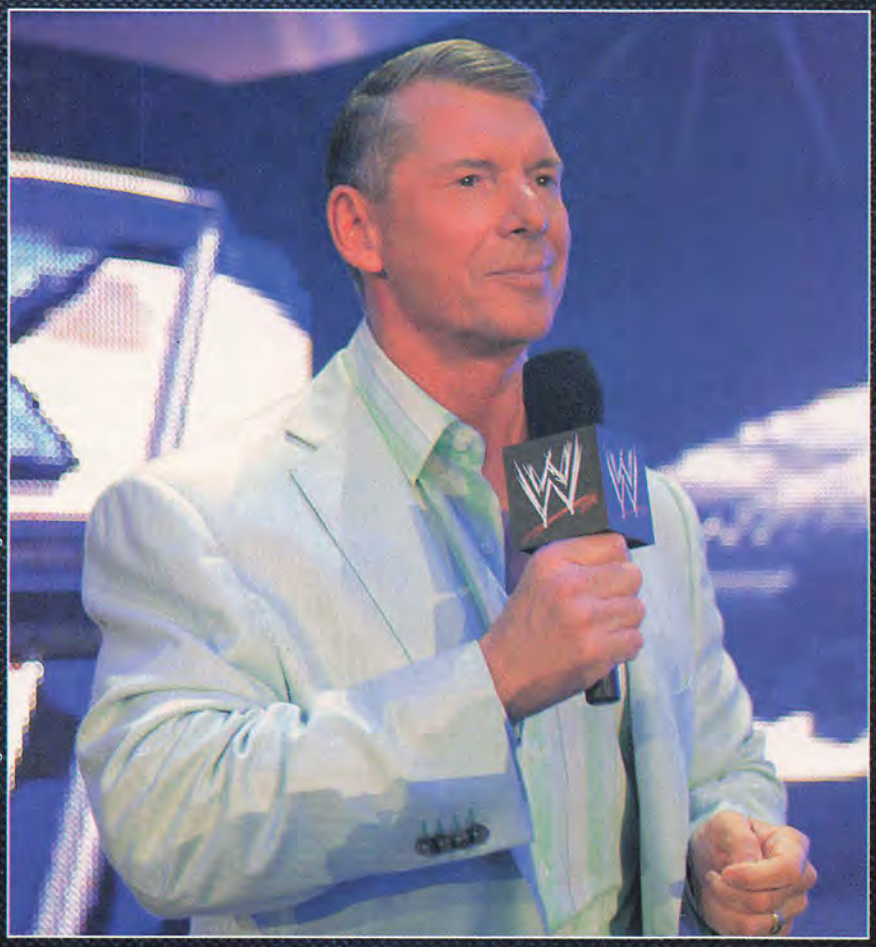
Although they haven't been together very long, Matt Striker and Josh Matthews have found a chemistry that makes them the best duo on the list. And the longer these two are together, the better they are going to get.



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Vince McMahon should be smiling more. For yet another year Raw takes home the top spot in the business world. The McMahon Empire is only getting stronger as time goes on.

But TV ratings aren't necessarily the most important factor to a company's bottom line. WWE is keeping arena attendance strong by dropping minimum ticket prices and doing heavy advertising to promote live events. ECW rides on Smackdown's coattails, and probably couldn't survive on its own merit. TNA continues to struggle; its ratings are impressive, but they're not translating into PPV buys and live event attendance is awful. With a roster featuring Kurt Angle, Mick Foley, Samoa Joe, Beer Money, and so many others, something is seriously wrong when the company struggles to draw 1,000 paying fans for an event.

The international market is hot for both WWE and TNA.

As for ROH, the company relies heavily on DVD sales, which have dropped along with the economy. With the loss of Bryan Danielson and Nigel McGuinness, things are looking bleak.

Rank: 1) Raw; 2) Smackdown; 3) TNA; 4) ECW; 5) ROH. [Last year: 1) Raw; 2) Smackdown; 3) TNA; 4) ECW; 5) ROH]

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

TNA may not be bring in the same revenue as Raw, but in our categorical analysis, at least, it is Raw's equal. In fairness, the TNA would not stack up as well if WWE's brands were judged as a unit.

OUR RESULTS

Last year, WWE's Raw brand beat out TNA by a score of 22 to 18. This year, TNA closed the gap in dramatic fashion as both Raw and TNA scored 19 points each. TNA's Knockouts division and tag team division deserve the lion's share of the credit, as TNA has picked up the slack in the areas where WWE has trailed off, or otherwise watered-down its talent by spreading it too thin across several brands.

While Raw and TNA tied at 19, Smackdown finished up in third place with 15 points, followed closely by ROH with 14 points. Once again, ECW finished in last place with 10 points. However, ECW and ROH are at a bit of a disadvantage, as those brands only have one-hour television shows, compared to two-hour shows for Raw, Smackdown, and TNA.

Raw vs. Smackdown vs. TNA vs. ECW vs. ROH

WHO ARE THE BEST OF THE BEST?

To evaluate the singles rosters of Raw, Smackdown, ECW, TNA, and Ring of Honor, we identified the top 15 wrestlers in each brand as of this writing, and evaluated each wrestler in a side-by-side comparison with his counterpart in each of the five promotions/brands.

These top 15 rankings were made as of September 13. You will notice they differ from the rankings elsewhere in this issue, as those rankings are compiled immediately before press time to ensure they are as up-to-date as possible.

We identified six areas of comparison for each wrestler:

"What He Has Going For Him" is an evaluation of each wrestler's particular strength, be it his wrestling ability, veteran leadership, fan appeal, or some other quality that makes him stand out from his peers.

"Biggest Knock Against Him" is the criticism most frequently aimed at that wrestler. This criticism doesn't necessarily represent the feelings of our editorial staff; rather it is the acknowledgement of a negative public perception attached to each wrestler. In a business where perception is so important, this can be a critical category.

"Ring Presence" combines two different elements—star quality and ring generalship. These two elements can be interrelated, as the premier ring generals have the knowledge and confidence that helps them stand out. When a wrestler comes to the ring, do the fans sit up and take notice, or is it time to visit the concession stand?

"Oratory Skills" refers to a wrestler's ability to convey his point on the microphone. Do his promos make people want to buy a ticket to see him wrestle?

"Momentum Going Into '10" is our attempt to evaluate if this wrestler is on an upswing or slumping. It is the most difficult category to gauge, because things can—and do—change in an instant in wrestling.

The most controversial part of our annual "Face-Off" comparisons can be found on the following pages where we compare the top 15 of each brand. See if you agree with our decisions, or if your rankings would change the way the 2009 "Face-Offs" played out. □

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JOHN CENA

What He Has Going For Him: Cena is the most marketable personality in the sport, and wrestling's fair-haired ambassador to the mainstream media. He's clean-cut, good-looking, well-spoken, patriotic, and charismatic. Oh, and he's also tremendously powerful and sells more merchandise than anyone else in the game.

Biggest Knock Against Him: His offense is one-dimensional and his interview segments can be childish. Critics say he's protected by WWE matchmakers, yet Cena continues to pass every test and remains the top star in the biggest promotion in the world.

Ring Presence: Cena certainly gets the superstar treatment. But his killer instinct is lacking, he showboats too much, and he wastes too much energy trying to power out of holds instead of either forcing a rope break or simply learning a countermove.

Oratory Skills: When Cena is on his game, he can be quite entertaining. However, his cutesy promos make anyone over 14 gag.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 3

Momentum Going Into '10: Like it or not, Cena is the man to beat in WWE. "The Champ's" not going away anytime soon.

C.M. PUNK

What He Has Going For Him: The former ROH champ endured WWE developmental, debuted in ECW with little fanfare, and gradually built up a following to propel him to one of the most prestigious titles in wrestling. Then he became a sanctimonious windbag, lost his fans, and managed to achieve even more.

Biggest Knock Against Him: Punk still lacks credibility. Each of his world titles has been "tainted" by his preying on weakened opponents. If Punk wants people to respect him, he's going to need to beat someone cleanly.

Ring Presence: He doesn't have "the look" of a typical muscle-bound wrestler, but he exudes such pure confidence that he comes across as a legitimate superstar, regardless of whether he's a heel or fan favorite. That is extremely hard to do.

Oratory Skills: Punk has always been an incredible talker. The WWE version has been watered down from his indy days, but he's hitting his stride as the holier-than-thou champ.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 8

Momentum Going Into '10: Punk is one of the most unique and dynamic competitors wrestling has seen in years. With the level of competition on Smackdown, he's unlikely to be a long-term champion, but he has certainly graduated from the midcard.

CHRISTIAN

What He Has Going For Him: His WWE return was decidedly low-key. But Christian's debut was more in line with his personality. He is a gritty competitor who is willing to fight to succeed. He has a workmanlike approach and is a competent and talented competitor who is always a potential show-stealer.

Biggest Knock Against Him: More than a decade after his WWE debut, we still don't know if he is a legit main-eventer. He had a solid run in TNA, but that company's fixation on multiple-man title matches prevented him from ever truly establishing himself. He has accomplished a great deal, but he's still capable of much more.

Ring Presence: When his music hits, the fans react like he is a superstar. Unfortunately, a lot of that enthusiasm tends to peter out once the bell rings. That's not a knock on his abilities; it's just that Christian typically wrestles a fundamentally solid, yet unspectacular style.

Oratory Skills: Christian is one of those rare wrestlers who always has a snappy comeback and consistently delivers strong interviews.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 28

Momentum Going Into '10: We have to believe Christian is hoping to use ECW as a steppingstone to Raw or Smackdown. He is going to have to do more to distinguish himself from the pack if he wants to make a splash on a more prominent WWE brand.

KURT ANGLE

What He Has Going For Him: An unparalleled technician, Angle is a total package of wrestling ability, experience, and mainstream name recognition. Though he has been beset by injuries, Angle is always capable of delivering Match of the Year-caliber bouts and is one of the most reliable competitors in the business.

Biggest Knock Against Him: He's erratic and his behavior is catching up to him. With recent arrests, his divorce, and a public feud with Jeff Jarrett, Angle is a mixed blessing in the TNA locker room. At best, he's a superior athlete. At worst, he's a distraction and on a course to self-destruction.

Ring Presence: No other wrestler has made such a smooth transition from the amateur mats to the squared circle. Angle is a consummate student of the game and has mastered everything from subtle nuances to bombastic high-risk moves like the moonsault.

Oratory Skills: Angle loves the sound of his own voice, and he's an effective interview, but he's a much better wrestler than talker.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 12

Momentum Going Into '10: He may be the reigning champion, but he's also made insinuations that he might be looking to go back to WWE. With his vendetta against Jarrett, he's just as likely to wind up with more power in TNA than anything else.

AUSTIN ARIES

What He Has Going For Him: A proficient mat wrestler with an array of high-impact finishers and submission locks, Aries regularly proves that the size of the dog in the fight is less important than the size of the fight in the dog.

Biggest Knock Against Him: Aries is undersized and under-tested. He has been one of ROH's top stars for the past several years, but he hasn't strayed far from the promotion nor tested himself against outside talent. The fact that he hasn't ventured too far from his comfort zones makes critics wonder if he could ever become a top star nationally.

Ring Presence: He has trained countless wrestlers and seems perfectly at home in the ring. ROH fans see him as the real deal, but to those unfamiliar with his accomplishments, he's just another little guy with a chip on his shoulder.

Oratory Skills: Aries has plenty of swagger. He's good at building up matches and drawing attention, though his delivery is a tad forced and his put-downs a bit formulaic.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 23

Momentum Going Into '10: Aries has the ROH strap today, but we expect Tyler Black will have it soon. Then Aries will take a big step down on the card.

WINNER: JOHN CENA

You can list out all the negatives … one-dimensional offense, silly promos, vanilla personality, etc. The fact remains that Cena is the single most marketable wrestler in the world today. He's also had clean wins over Shawn Michaels, Triple-H, Randy Orton, and The Big Show. How many people can say that?

Photo by George Tahinos

RANDY ORTON

What He Has Going For Him: "The Legend Killer," with an explosive offensive attack, an impeccable pedigree, and a chilling sadistic streak, is the best heel of his era. The scary thing is that at a mere 29 years old, it's possible Orton is still a few years away from his prime.

Biggest Knock Against Him: Orton is a classic narcissist, and his pride constantly gets in the way of his better judgment. The same arrogance that makes him dangerous is also his Achilles heel.

Ring Presence: He has an innate understanding of where he is at all times and can execute his RKO with lightning precision. He was also willing to step back and accept a disqualification to preserve his title reign.

Oratory Skills: Orton exudes a quiet confidence and a seething inner hatred. When he takes the microphone, he doesn't need to resort to catchphrases or cute quips to engage the audience. He doesn't get a lot of ink for it, but he's one of the top promo men in the business.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 5

Momentum Going Into '10: With his defeat to John Cena at Breaking Point, Orton is once again in the role of hunter. Still, his spot as Raw's top rulebreaker seems secure for the foreseeable future.

JOHN MORRISON

What He Has Going For Him: He is acrobatic, athletic, and innovative. Borrowing liberally from the playbooks of Shawn Michaels, Jeff Hardy, and Rick Rude, Morrison combines athleticism with sexiness to become one of Smackdown's top young lions.

Biggest Knock Against Him: He needs to prove himself in matches against some big names like C.M. Punk, The Undertaker, or Chris Jericho. Until he does that, he'll always be just another pretty boy wannabe.

Ring Presence: Morrison still seems a bit too hasty at times, as if he's afraid to take his time. He rushes through moves and often forces them at the wrong time. That will change with more experience.

Oratory Skills: When he's not trying to channel "The Lizard King" of Jim Morrison, he's not a bad interview. He's at his best when he's speaking as himself, and he's been doing much more of that lately.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 46

Momentum Going Into '10: Morrison is in a perfect position for 2010. He is poised for the World title picture, and should certainly be challenging for that belt by the end of 2009. He's ready to assume the mantle Jeff Hardy relinquished and become Smackdown's most beloved star.

WILLIAM REGAL

What He Has Going For Him: With two decades of experience, superior grappling skills, and tremendous speaking ability, Regal is a well-rounded utility player who can compete for championships or fill in as a role player when needed.

Biggest Knock Against Him: Just over a year ago, some predicted Regal would win a world championship. An ill-timed suspension ruined that scenario, and Regal has yet to recover. An eight-second loss to Christian at SummerSlam was just another of the regrettable disappointments that have haunted him throughout his career.

Ring Presence: Regal always knows where he is in the ring at any moment. He uses that awareness to his advantage, forcing breaks and sneaking cheap shots where he can. But, as SummerSlam showed, he needs to remember to never turn his back to an opponent.

Oratory Skills: Not only is Regal a wonderful orator, he also has some of the best facial expressions in wrestling. Regal is one of the most effective, believable, and enjoyable interview subjects in the business.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 41

Momentum Going Into '10: Regal's future is hard to predict. If he can capture the ECW title, he could put together a lengthy reign. But if he fails to take the title, his future could be bleak.

SAMOA JOE

What He Has Going For Him: Powerful and determined, Joe can be a juggernaut, bullying opponents with his strength and stymieing them with a variety of chokes and MMA-inspired locks. He's a multi-dimensional powerhouse with a wicked nasty streak.

Biggest Knock Against Him: Once considered the can't-miss breakout star of the promotion, Joe has lapsed back to the X division. Instead of battling the Main Event Mafia, Joe eventually followed the path of least resistance and joined the group. His stock has plummeted.

Ring Presence: There's a reason ROH fans popularized the chant "Joe is gonna kill you." With his steely eyes and laser-like focus, Joe looks like a predator. He's an intimidator and he can back it up.

Oratory Skills: He can be passionate and heartfelt, but he often comes across as whiny. He always has a chip on his shoulder, battling some injustice. Once a wrestler gets a reputation as a whiner, he can be hard to take seriously (see Bret Hart).

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 29

Momentum Going Into '10: The X division title has given Joe some stability in a turbulent year, but he's definitely going backward. He had his chance and he blew it, and he won't get many more chances in 2010.

TYLER BLACK

What He Has Going For Him: He mixes lethal kicks and strikes, high-impact finishers, and dazzling aerial artistry, making him one of the most exciting and well-rounded wrestlers anywhere.

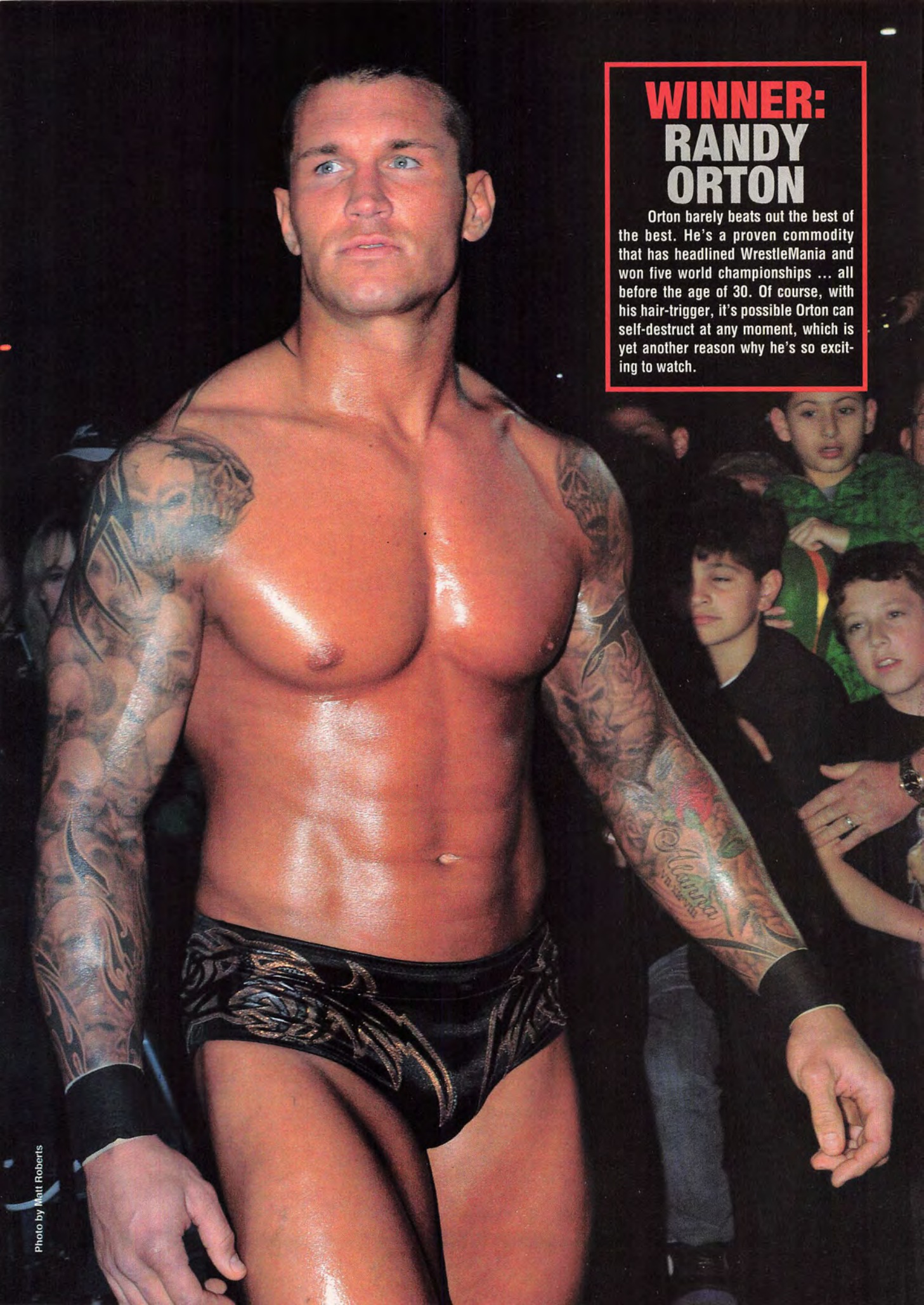
Biggest Knock Against Him: The ROH title can be notoriously hard to win. It took Homicide and Punk years to do it. But since coming so close in February 2008, both Jerry Lynn and Austin Aries have leapfrogged him to the championship. He's still the heir apparent, but he has some real problems in closing the deal.

Ring Presence: He has a unique physique: lean and not overly muscled, which actually helps him stand out from the pack. Black can fly, he can fight, he can grapple. It's hard to believe he's been wrestling only four years.

Oratory Skills: Like C.M. Punk, Black is direct and engaging. He speaks with ease and confidence, and doesn't belabor his point with lengthy interviews.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 17

Momentum Going Into '10: Black's ascension to the top of ROH seems inevitable, but he still needs to take that final step. He's in position to become ROH's next standout champion and it could happen soon.



WINNER: RANDY ORTON

Orton barely beats out the best of the best. He's a proven commodity that has headlined WrestleMania and won five world championships ... all before the age of 30. Of course, with his hair-trigger, it's possible Orton can self-destruct at any moment, which is yet another reason why he's so exciting to watch.

Photo by Matt Roberts

TRIPLE-H

What He Has Going For Him: A ring technician in the mold of Ric Flair and Harley Race, Triple-H is a throwback competitor with a modern physique and an innate understanding of the pro game.

Biggest Knock Against Him: Triple-H has been near the top of WWE for a decade now, and his critics say he's grown stale. Worse, he is frequently accused of using his political pull to remain on top and undercut others who threaten to steal his spot.

Ring Presence: HHH is a master of psychological warfare. His slow, methodical ring entrance is intimidating and brings the fans to their feet. Once the bell rings, he tends to keep the action in the center of the ring. He takes few risks and controls the pace of a match.

Oratory Skills: Few wrestlers have the versatility of Triple-H, who can be deadly serious and also purposely silly and self-aware. If ever a wrestler came across as truly relaxed on the mike, it's Triple-H.

2009 "PWI 500" Ranking: 1

Momentum Going Into '10: If you can find a bookie to take this bet, make it: Triple-H will headline WrestleMania again … and he'll probably win. Again.

REY MYSTERIO JR.

What He Has Going For Him: Quick, beloved, innovative, and ridiculously marketable, Rey Mysterio Jr. is a crowd-pleaser. He constantly finds new ways to thrill even the most jaded fans, and he's seen as a super-hero by kids.

Biggest Knock Against Him: For as much as Rey has achieved, he'll always been treated as a novelty act in WWE. He's just too small for WWE matchmakers to treat him as anything other than the lovable underdog. Unless he can grow 10 inches without sacrificing his agility, Rey will always be up against the glass ceiling.

Ring Presence: Few wrestlers crank up the adrenaline like Rey. He always elicits a huge crowd response, and even though he routinely executes dangerous maneuvers, he rarely has a mental lapse.

Oratory Skills: He is humble enough so that his interviews gel with his underdog persona. If he trash-talked like other wrestlers, it would come across as hollow and phony.

2009 "PWI 500" Ranking: 26

Momentum Going Into '10: Shortly before press time, WWE announced Mysterio was suspended for violating its Wellness Policy. This can be particularly damaging, given Rey's appeal to kids. How he handles the suspension, and whether there is any long-term disciplinary effect, will determine Rey's 2010.

TOMMY DREAMER

What He Has Going For Him: The last man standing from the original ECW is a cult hero and represents to "Do It Yourself" drive and tenacity that turned a tiny indy promotion into the third-largest wrestling company in the U.S. He has street cred and plenty of heart.

Biggest Knock Against Him: Injuries have taken a heavy toll, and the hardcore style in which he thrived has fallen out of favor. He wasn't a great technical wrestler in his prime, and his prime was 10 years ago.

Ring Presence: Let's face it: He looks like a schlub. That was part of his appeal in the original ECW, but it hurts him in today's WWE. As for style, he's hampered by being unable to use chairs and other weapons as much as he once did.

Oratory Skills: He is passionate and high-minded, and genuinely wants to give his best for the fans. He's not a great talker, but when Dreamer speaks, fans can be assured he's being honest with them.

2009 "PWI 500" Ranking: 104

Momentum Going Into '10: Unfortunately, we suspect Dreamer's recent ECW title reign was his swan song. He will always be a role player in ECW and a sentimental favorite, but he's unlikely to match his success of 2009 next year.

A.J. STYLES

What He Has Going For Him: He flies with grace and precision. He's a daredevil who has been loyal to TNA since its inception. Based on his heart, work ethic, and past performance, he should be considered TNA's franchise player.

Biggest Knock Against Him: Styles has allowed himself to be taken for granted. He recently attempted to retire, indicating that even Styles has lost confidence in himself. He badly needs a change of scenery or a sabbatical to recharge his batteries.

Ring Presence: He's in a comfort zone and he comes across less as an innovator than as a tired band just playing standard hits. He's lost his passion, and it's obvious.

Oratory Skills: He tries to sound threatening or determined, but his promos usually come across as forced. His best interview in many months was when he said he was retiring; it was the most believable we've ever seen him.

2009 "PWI 500" Ranking: 19

Momentum Going Into '10: A disappointing loss in the best-of-three series against Matt Morgan was a setback, but Styles needs to recover and avoid the pitfalls that felled Rhino. If he can focus on the World title, he can get back to the top, but he needs to get his confidence back first.

JERRY LYNN

What He Has Going For Him: For more than 20 years, he's built a reputation as one of the top high-flyers and most respected veterans on the circuit. A mentor to younger competitors, Lynn always goes all-out and delivers tremendous matches.

Biggest Knock Against Him: At 46 years old, one can't help but wonder how much longer Lynn's body can hold up on him. He's going to slow down one day, and speed and aerial excellence have been his calling cards. Without those, he's a less effective wrestler.

Ring Presence: The fans who know what Lynn has achieved over the past 20 years consider him to be a living legend, but mainstream fame has continuously eluded him. He wrestles, he wins, and he conducts himself like a sportsman and a gentleman.

Oratory Skills: Lynn may not be verbose, but he is direct. His promos are well thought-out and build interest in his matches, and he usually speaks without yelling and screaming.

2009 "PWI 500" Ranking: 40

Momentum Going Into '10: Lynn had a banner year in 2009, but he's unlikely to match that success in 2010. He's on the downside of his career, but anyone who makes the mistake of counting him out is a fool.

WINNER: TRIPLE-H

The Raw brand goes 3-0 with this selection. This year's top dog in the "*PWI* 500" is the most decorated champion in the game today and simply brings more to the table than anyone else.

Photo by George Tahinos

TED DiBIASE JR.

What He Has Going For Him: The third-generation grappler is widely considered to be one of WWE's stars of the future. He is fundamentally solid and savvy beyond his years.

Biggest Knock Against Him: His wrestling style has been purposely bland. He has been content to punch, kick, and double-team his way to success instead of showcasing the technical skills he displayed in FCW.

Ring Presence: At 6'4", 235 pounds, DiBiase is not the kind of guy you'd want to pick a fight with in the local gin mill. But, in WWE, he needs to develop a unique look and show more charisma than he has to date.

Oratory Skills: "The Million-Dollar Man" was one of the best talkers of the 1980s. Ted Jr. prefers to let Randy Orton do most of the talking. That might be a good strategy, but it leaves us wondering how Ted Jr. will measure up to Pops.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 44

Momentum Going Into '10: As one-third of Legacy, DiBiase is already part of one of wrestling's hottest acts. Many insiders say DiBiase could be a future world champion. We expect DiBiase to wear singles gold in 2010.

DOLPH ZIGGLER

What He Has Going For Him: The former male cheerleader earned respect in his showings against Rey Mysterio Jr. and finally had people seeing him as one of Smackdown's rising stars. A tremendous physical specimen with impressive cardiovascular skill, he's one of the promising talents on the Smackdown roster.

Biggest Knock Against Him: Ziggler has looked impressive in recent months, but he needs a major win to fully erase the way he was portrayed as a joke during his fist few months using this identity. He needs one big win on a major stage to prove he has what it takes to succeed at the elite level.

Ring Presence: He mixes superb amateur-style takedowns and reversals with methodical brawling tactics, maintains hip control when grappling, and always leaves himself an out when it comes to escapes, reversals, and rope breaks. He is an underrated technician.

Oratory Skills: Ziggler is a guilty pleasure; he's so full of himself that it's impossible not to like his interviews.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 113

Momentum Going Into '10: Don't be surprised if Ziggler has a belt around his waist by the time this magazine hits stands. If a few things go his way, we could see him winning Money in the Bank at 'Mania and making a challenge for a world title next year.

VLADIMIR KOZLOV

What He Has Going For Him: The massive Russian may not have many fans, but you simply cannot argue with his record. He has been a virtually unstoppable force ever since joining WWE. He has a background in sambo and kickboxing ... and he has the hardest headbutt since Bobo Brazil.

Biggest Knock Against Him: Kozlov isn't likely to marvel anyone with his flat-over suplexes and chain-wrestling technique, but his smash-mouth style is tremendously effective. Why master submission holds when you can pound opponents into ground beef and finish them off with a quick headbutt to the sternum?

Ring Presence: From the moment he steps into the ring, he simply defies opponents to beat him. He lacks polish and struggles against veterans who can match his power.

Oratory Skills: Kozlov makes Ivan Drago look like Muhammad Ali. He's simply awful.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 53

Momentum Going Into '10: Kozlov has finally found his niche alongside William Regal and Ezekiel Jackson. With Regal as a mentor and Jackson as a partner, Kozlov will develop into a much more complete wrestler. He could make a run for the ECW title and use that as a steppingstone back to Raw or Smackdown.

STING

What He Has Going For Him: Sting is one of wrestling's all-time greats. His name helped give TNA credibility during its early years, and he has helped many of the company's younger wrestlers elevate their games and try to get to the next level. He's both a draw and a teacher.

Biggest Knock Against Him: He hasn't wrestled a full-time schedule in years, he takes frequent sabbaticals, and he seems to tease retirement at least once a year.

Ring Presence: If there's one lesson we wish Sting could teach TNA's underclassmen, it's how to project such a superstar image. He knows the importance of image and star power, and he can still drive fans crazy with a simple appearance or surprise entrance.

Oratory Skills: Over the past two years, Sting has really delivered. Especially when speaking about earning respect and persevering, it's obvious that he's speaking from the heart, and his sincerity gives more power to his delivery.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 9

Momentum Going Into '10: Rumor has it Sting is once again mulling retirement when his TNA contract expires. Only Sting knows what the future holds. If he decided to remain, TNA will welcome him, and another title reign is likely.

RODERICK STRONG

What He Has Going For Him: The Ring of Honor stalwart is known for his creative array of backbreakers, neckbreakers, and suplexes. Small in stature, he is a solid mat-based grappler, reminiscent of Dean Malenko in style.

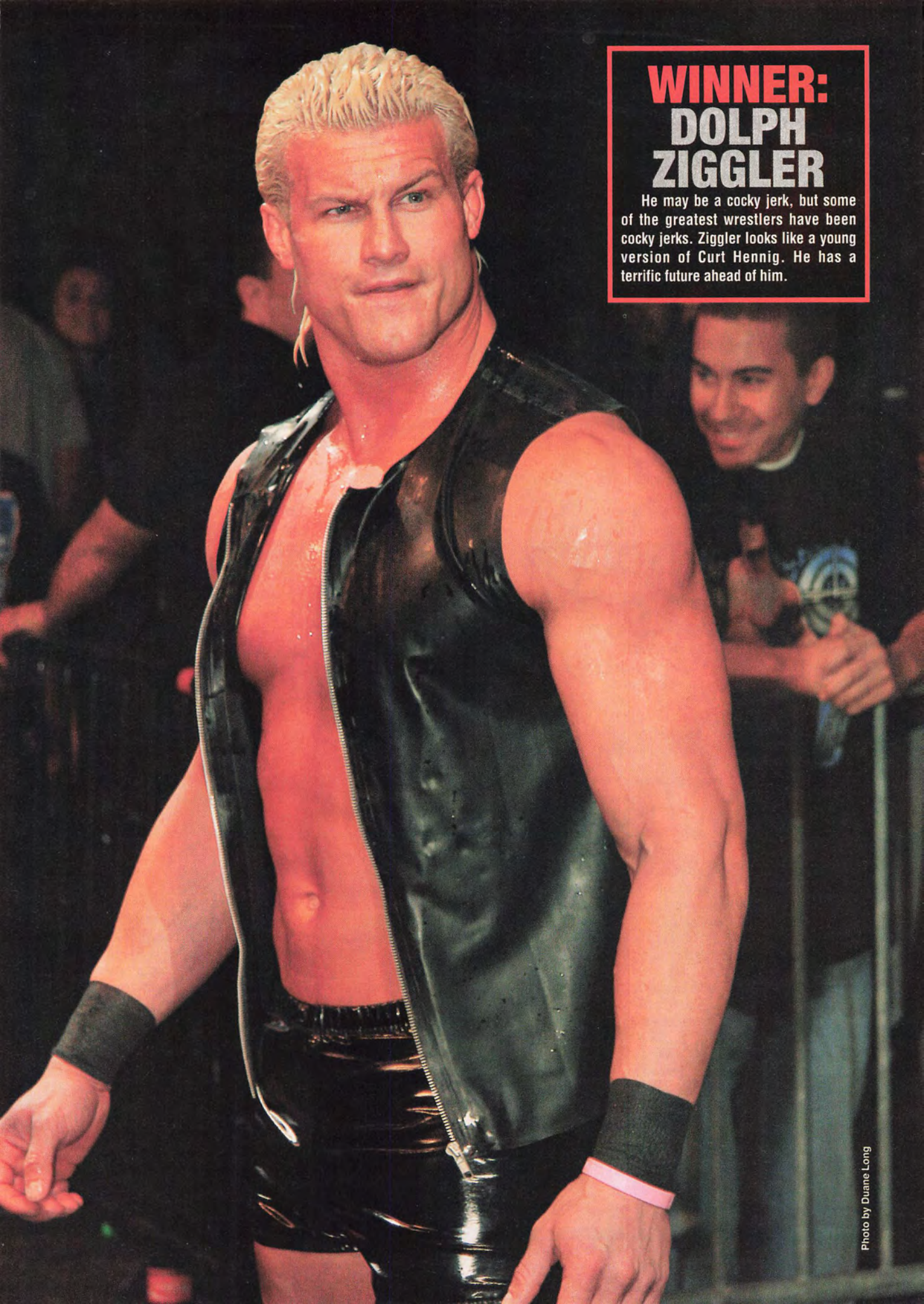
Biggest Knock Against Him: He's a very capable wrestler who's won many titles, but he needs to show more personality.

Ring Presence: He exploits any weakness like a starving hyena. But he doesn't project the aura that a wrestler of his caliber should.

Oratory Skills: This is another area where Strong falls short. He often stammers through interviews. Thankfully, he can rely on his mat skills to get along in ROH and not his promos.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 61

Momentum Going Into '10: Strong is basically in the same spot in ROH that he's been in for the past few years. He's an upper-midcard act who occasionally challenges for the title and comes up short. We see no reason for that to change—either for better or for worse—in the next 12 months. He is at a plateau and needs to find a way to blast out of the doldrums.



WINNER: DOLPH ZIGGLER

He may be a cocky jerk, but some of the greatest wrestlers have been cocky jerks. Ziggler looks like a young version of Curt Hennig. He has a terrific future ahead of him.

Photo by Duane Long

KOFI KINGSTON

What He Has Going For Him: The affable Jamaican is an unorthodox striker with preternatural leaping ability and oodles of charisma. Kingston's unique offense makes him a challenging match for any opponent.

Biggest Knock Against Him: Happy-go-lucky may play well down on the islands, but WWE is a cutthroat working environment. Without a drive to reach the pinnacle of success, he'll forever remain slotted in the midcard.

Ring Presence: He can keep stronger foes at bay, and strike with precision at a relatively low risk to himself. He has the quickness to elude direct attacks and the explosiveness to lash out with strikes or takedowns that keep opponents off-balance.

Oratory Skills: Kingston is laidback and cool, without being arrogant. We'd like to see him occasionally lose his cool and show some anger or frustration when wronged. If he's so nonplussed about winning or losing, why should the fans care, either?

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 35

Momentum Going Into '10: Kingston was one of the show-stealers in the MITB match at WM 25, and he's an early favorite to be a major factor in the match next year. We don't see him making a world title run yet, but some higher-profile matches against top competition should keep him near the top of the Raw roster.

CHRIS JERICHO

What He Has Going For Him: Jericho has become the man wrestling fans love to hate. He has shined as a wrestler who always delivers and one who relishes his role as a bad guy.

Biggest Knock Against Him: Jericho has a tendency to stick his nose where it doesn't belong out of a misplaced sense of pride, and it has embarrassed him several times.

Ring Presence: Jericho was one of the last class of wrestlers to have graduated from the territory system before arriving in WWE. He has traveled the world and is fluent in dozens of different styles and techniques. He's an expert storyteller and one of wrestling's best ring generals.

Oratory Skills: Jericho has said he changed his interview style after seeing the movie No Country For Old Men. He lowered his voice and spoke with righteous indignation, avoiding the stereotypical cadences of a typical wrestling promo. By doing so, he became the best interview subject of the past few years.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 2

Momentum Going Into '10: Once one of wrestling's angry young men, Jericho has matured into one of the sport's elder statesmen. A 2010 feud with Edge seems all but assured, and title belts seem to be an inevitability.

FINLAY

What He Has Going For Him: He is a tough-as-nails brawler and a master of ground submissions. He's also WWE's go-to man for working with young, promising talent. Finlay forces opponents to work harder ... or get hurt.

Biggest Knock Against Him: Age is starting to catch up to the feisty Irishman. His WWE career has really been an unlikely story, given his age, unorthodox style, and look. But with each passing year, Finlay becomes less effective.

Ring Presence: Finlay knows how to use the ring itself as a weapon. He knows all the tricks and he knows plenty of ways to hurt people, many of which he picked up in the taverns of Ulster.

Oratory Skills: Finlay isn't exactly eloquent, but he gets the job done. He is a confident and believable speaker and has an ability to build interest in his matches through a brief 20-second promo.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 47

Momentum Going Into '10: Finlay isn't likely to contend for any major championships next year. Instead, his role seems to be acting as a mentor to younger talent. With FCW's best and brightest entering WWE via ECW, Finlay is in a perfect place to work.

MATT MORGAN

What He Has Going For Him: For years, Jim Cornette has touted Morgan as a future star, and the genetically jacked, athletically stacked walking giant looks like he's finally about to fulfill his star potential.

Biggest Knock Against Him: Let's face it: A man his size should be a truly dominant force, but Morgan is often tentative and unsure of himself. He tries to outwrestle smaller opponents when he should be steamrolling them.

Ring Presence: Morgan looks far more dominant than he is. Until he starts decisively beating wrestlers he towers above, he'll always be considered an underachiever.

Oratory Skills: In his WWE days, Morgan was saddled with a career-endangering stutter, largely to hide the fact that he's not a good speaker. He's improved considerably, but he still comes across as reciting pre-memorized lines instead of simply reacting or engaging the listener.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 86

Momentum Going Into '10: TNA has high hopes for Morgan, and there's the potential for him to take the TNA World title and be the man who ends the Mafia's stranglehold on the company. But the Mafia has turned aside plenty of would-be saviors. How Morgan fares in the next two months will determine where he is in 2010.

CLAUDIO CASTAGNOLI

What He Has Going For Him: At 6'5" and 240 pounds, Castagnoli is one of the biggest men in Ring of Honor. He's a talented wrestler with a European panache. Colorful, strong, and consistently entertaining.

Biggest Knock Against Him: A couple years ago, Castagnoli was signed to a WWE developmental contract. Surprisingly, he was released within a few weeks. He needs to overcome the stigma of that rejection to avoid being seen as "damaged goods."

Ring Presence: With his expensive suits and blue-blood demeanor, Castagnoli looks like a star.

Oratory Skills: CC is a great character and always delivers fun, entertaining interviews. He's so good on the stick, it makes his WWE release all the more puzzling.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 67

Momentum Going Into '10: Castagnoli has come close to winning the ROH title on several occasions, but hasn't gotten the job done. He's actually stagnating in ROH. He seems well suited for TNA's World Elite faction.

WINNER: CHRIS JERICHO

We received a heap of letters and e-mails when we ranked Jericho number two in this year's "*PWI* 500." Many fans thought he should have been number one. He couldn't beat out Triple-H for that spot, but he does beat the competition in this face-off.

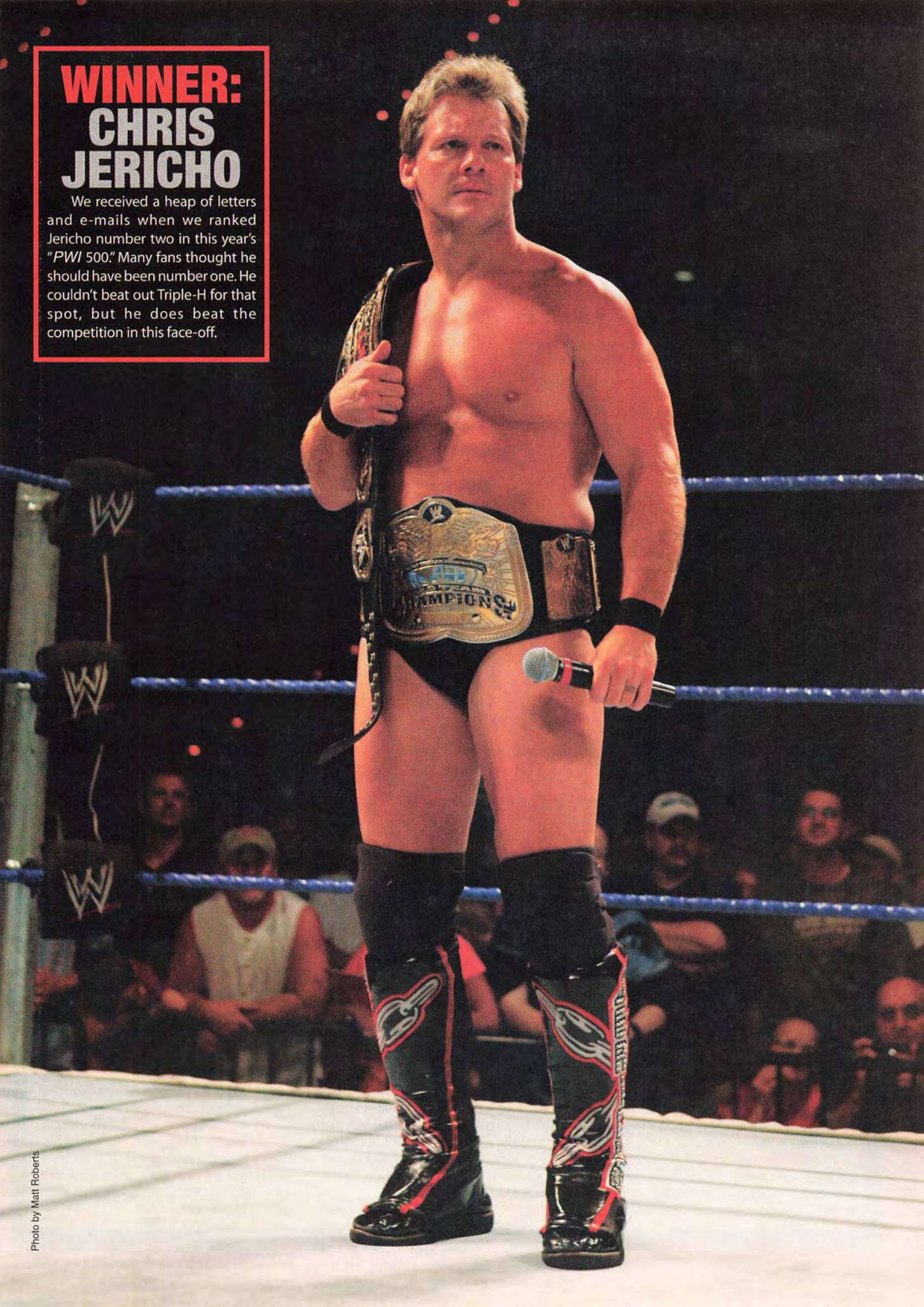


Photo by Matt Roberts

SHAWN MICHAELS

What He Has Going For Him: Michaels makes it his personal mission to steal the show every time he competes, and he regularly puts forth Match of the Year caliber performances. He's a proven veteran that still has plenty of gas left in the tank.

Biggest Knock Against Him: Michaels has been known to get complacent from time to time. He hasn't seriously challenged for a world title in more than a year. When he's not driven, he's content to do the comedy thing.

Ring Presence: With more than a quarter-century of experience under his belt, Michaels knows all the tricks. He rarely gets outsmarted or outmaneuvered, and he's universally considered to be an all-time great. He's a main-event talent in every way.

Oratory Skills: He can be charming and funny or intense and foreboding. He has mastered the subtle nuances that make a great promo. No one ever quite knows what to expect from him at a given time, which makes his interviews must-hear segments.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 14

Momentum Going Into '10: If Michaels is content to be Triple-H's comic foil, 2010 can be more of the same clowning and product shilling. But if Michaels can regain his passion for singles competition, more Match of the Year bouts are sure to follow.

KANE

What He Has Going For Him: Big, powerful, and mean-spirited, Kane is a perennial threat and one of the most imposing wrestlers in the business.

Biggest Knock Against Him: Kane has been treading water for years. His character has grown stale. Considering his power and sadism, Kane should be involved in more than just mid-card filler.

Ring Presence: He looks impressive, but he's not nearly as impressive as a man of his size and strength should be.

Oratory Skills: When Kane isn't brooding in mute fury, he's ranting, raving, and screaming like a lunatic. Both interview styles are effective at times, but Kane has gone to both extremes so often that it's impossible to take anything he says seriously anymore.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 37

Momentum Going Into '10: Win, lose, or draw, his feud against The Great Khali isn't going to do anything to help Kane's career. Kane has no momentum; he's just there. He bounces from brand to brand, has some mediocre feuds, and vanishes for a while. That's been his pattern for years. There's no reason to believe that pattern will change in 2010.

SHEAMUS

What He Has Going For Him: The "Celtic Warrior" is a promising newcomer with size, strength, and an impressive finishing move in the Irish Curse. His offense is a throwback to the days when heels were methodical power merchants, and he makes a compelling and fresh opponent for several WWE stars.

Biggest Knock Against Him: He has shown some promise in his feud against Goldust, but he hasn't quite dominated the former I-C champion. He isn't flashy and he doesn't have a particularly marketable gimmick. Basically, he's going to live and die on his wrestling ability alone.

Ring Presence: He doesn't command much of a reaction when he comes to the ring. He needs to do more to stand out so fans don't mistake him for an anonymous preliminary wrestler.

Oratory Skills: He hasn't spoken much, but the interviews he has done thus far have been direct and meaningful. Again, he's not flashy, but he's effective.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 94

Momentum Going Into '10: ECW is the perfect stage for him at this point in his career. With a little more seasoning, Sheamus should be ready for a jump to Raw or Smackdown, where he could be contending for the I-C or U.S. title next year.

HERNANDEZ

What He Has Going For Him: Big and charismatic, Hernandez is potentially one of TNA's most marketable stars. Embraced by the Latino community and slowly climbing the ladder of contention to the main-event level, Hernandez looks like a star on the rise.

Biggest Knock Against Him: He's still very green. For most of his career, he has been a tag team performer. His stamina is untested and his counter-wrestling abilities are unproven. Whether Hernandez has the skills and tact to navigate to the top remains to be seen.

Ring Presence: Hernandez has the size and knows how to use it. He instinctively cuts the ring in half and has the lateral quickness to prevent opponents from getting past him. Much like Bill Goldberg, he has the ability to quickly take control of a match and simply overpower an opponent for the quick victory.

Oratory Skills: The "Rough Cuts" interviews with Mike Tenay did a lot to flesh out the mysterious LAX star. Hernandez came across as humble, well-spoken, and genuine.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 66

Momentum Going Into '10: We expect very big things from Hernandez. He's going to make a run for the title sooner or later, and we think he's going to pull off the upset and win it.

COLT CABANA

What He Has Going For Him: The ROH favorite is an innovative wrestler with a great sense of humor and oodles of charisma. He's a main-event talent that can also work comedy matches or fill in anywhere he's needed on the card.

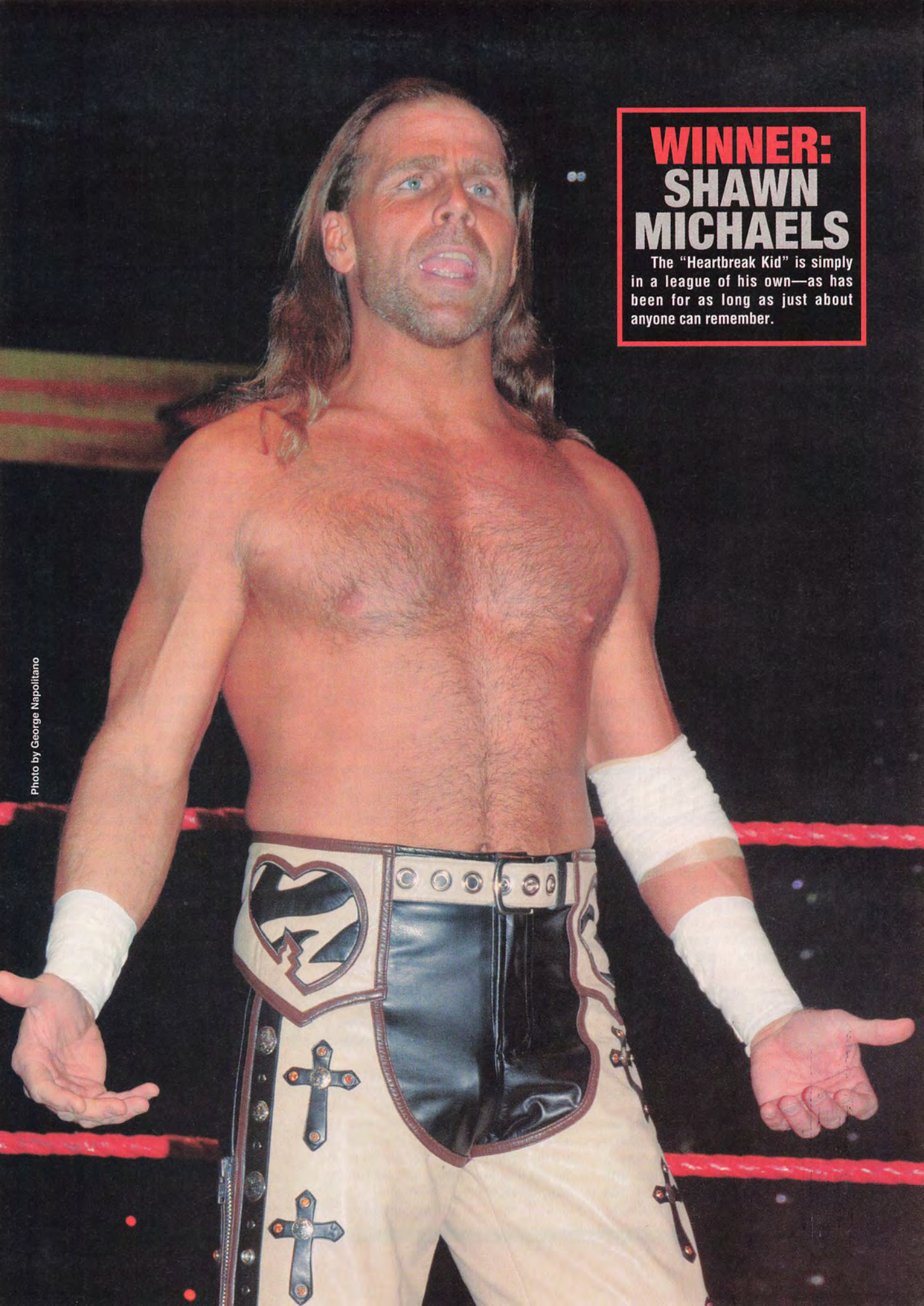
Biggest Knock Against Him: Scotty Goldman just never caught on in WWE. Cabana didn't just fail in WWE, his character has become a punchline. It's not entirely his fault; WWE matchmakers never gave Cabana a chance to let his wrestling or personality show.

Ring Presence: Cabana is a natural entertainer. He's not a particularly big guy and doesn't stand out as an imposing figure, but he's a showman. At the end of the night, you can be assured that fans walk away talking about Cabana.

Oratory Skills: This is where Cabana truly excels. It's bizarre that such a great talker was never given a chance to speak in WWE. Cabana recently made his stand-up comedy debut, and that's a perfect fit for him.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 238

Momentum Going Into '10: Cabana suffered a setback in WWE. But he built his reputation in ROH and he can rebuild it there as well. He needs to remind the world he can be a top-notch wrestler again.



WINNER: SHAWN MICHAELS

The "Heartbreak Kid" is simply in a league of his own—as has been for as long as just about anyone can remember.

Photo by George Napolitano

MVP

What He Has Going For Him: A solid technical wrestler with a mastery of counter-wrestling and submission locks, MVP also has a ferocious yakuza kick. He's a well-rounded wrestler with a growing fan base.

Biggest Knock Against Him: For every win that moves him higher up the ladder, he suffers a setback. Just when it looked like he was ready to challenge Randy Orton for the championship, he took a step backward to contend for the tag title.

Ring Presence: MVP needs a series of high-profile wins to erase that long losing streak from the fans' memory. He's not going to be accepted as a main-eventer—regardless of his talent—until he does.

Oratory Skills: While we like MVP as a fan favorite, he's actually a much more compelling heel. When he recently challenged Jack Swagger by ridiculing his lisp, MVP came across as a bully. It's hard for fans to get behind a guy who shows such natural heel inclinations.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 33

Momentum Going Into '10: MVP is on the championship periphery. It's time for him to show a new focus and a commitment to taking his game to a new level.

R-TRUTH

What He Has Going For Him: The former NWA champion is quick on his feet with a flashy, exciting offense and a crowd-pleasing ring entrance. He's a dynamic performer who can bring fans to their feet.

Biggest Knock Against Him: R-Truth lacks credibility. In fact, he often seems more interested in his "What's Up" rap and dancing than winning matches. A little flash and flair is good, but R-Truth's preoccupation with jukin', jivin', and goofing off (what was the deal with that Pretty Ricky character anyway?) is killing him.

Ring Presence: R-Truth is incredibly agile and limber. He can evade attacks with unique sit-out splits and back bends. He can strike with quick precision kicks and unique takedowns. He's exciting to watch, but he's always one misstep away from a major mistake, and those mistakes tend to cost him matches.

Oratory Skills: R-Truth is one of the most fun and entertaining talkers anywhere. His rapid-fire delivery and off-the-cuff comments can be hysterical. He had a bit more leeway in TNA, but he's still quite entertaining. He's a throwback to the great late-1970s interviews of Jimmy Valiant, Iceman Parsons, and Dusty Rhodes, but with an updated hip-hop vibe.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 80

Momentum Going Into '10: The former Ron Killings debuted on Smackdown with a good deal of fanfare, but that initial hype has died down considerably. He rarely competes on PPVs and hasn't been involved in any particularly memorable feuds or matches. That doesn't bode well for his future.

GOLDUST

What He Has Going For Him: Goldust is a unique performer with 20 years of experience. He has toned down the outrageousness of his earlier years, but as a part of the Attitude Era, Goldust has name recognition.

Biggest Knock Against Him: Inconsistency. His career has been filled with starts and stops. After a successful run as Goldust, he had an awful WCW run as Seven, followed by another WWE run, then some awful TNA stints. Sometimes he looks great, other times unmotivated.

Ring Presence: Goldust gets a nice reception when he comes to the ring, but fans tire of him quickly. He's a better character than wrestler. He's also past his prime and not as sharp as his younger cohorts.

Oratory Skills: Goldust is still entertaining on the microphone, even when he's doing some of his faux Tourette's Syndrome tics. He has great comic timing and delivery, but can also be very serious and intense.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 180

Momentum Going Into '10: ECW is a perfect setting for Goldust. With his experience, he can make a solid mentor for young talent. As a former I-C champion, he has credibility. A win over Goldust still means a lot.

HOMICIDE

What He Has Going For Him: Homicide blends streetfighting styles with lucha dives and puroresu high-impact maneuvers. His Gringo Killer driver is one of the most impressive finishers in the sport.

Biggest Knock Against Him: Sometimes Homicide needs a reality check. His tough-guy act might work on the streets of Brooklyn, but he needs to understand that in TNA, he's a small man in a land of giants. He's always inviting fights … and then usually getting thrown all over the ring. He's a great wrestler that needs to realize he shouldn't be trash-talking wrestlers that outweigh him by 100 pounds.

Ring Presence: Homicide is always running his mouth. Against similarly sized opponents, he comes off as confident. Against bigger competition, he comes off as a goofball who does not understand how overmatched he is.

Oratory Skills: Homicide has built a fan base with his intense promos, especially among Hispanic fans who love that he's always willing to represent La Raza.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 79

Momentum Going Into '10: Homicide should focus on being the cornerstone of the X and helping it become what it once was.

BRYAN DANIELSON

What He Has Going For Him: Danielson is widely considered the top technical wrestler today. No one better mixes technical wrestling and ground-and-pound.

Biggest Knock Against Him: Danielson has seemed content to be a big fish in a small pound. Shortly before press time, it was announced that he had signed with WWE. We're finally going to see how "The Best Wrestler In The World" can fare in the biggest promotion in the world.

Ring Presence: In ROH, Danielson is a phenom. The fans consider him an all-time great because they've seen him wrestle some epic matches through the years. But removed from that context, Danielson has a generic look and little charisma. He doesn't look like much, but looks can certainly be deceiving.

Oratory Skills: Danielson has been an adequate interview subject in ROH, but he's going to have to step up his game considerably if he wants to stand out in WWE.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 27

Momentum Going Into '10: If WWE presents Danielson as what he is—an elite wrestler—he can make it to the top. But if they force him to be something he isn't, Danielson may be the next Scotty Goldman, which would be a travesty.

WINNER: BRYAN DANIELSON

Danielson has built a reputation as the world's best by constantly striving to improve and developing more incredible moves and takedowns. No one can match his move set or grappling abilities.

Photo by Joe Zanolle

JACK SWAGGER

What He Has Going For Him: He has sterling collegiate credentials and a world of potential. Swagger also has confidence to spare and the grappling know-how to back it up.

Biggest Knock Against Him: He hasn't been as dominant on Raw as he was on ECW, and when he's not dominant, his swagger is appreciably lessened.

Ring Presence: Sometimes Swagger's a bit too full of himself for his own good. He really needs to achieve more before displaying that level of arrogance. He's certainly a competent wrestler, and he can handle himself in the ring, but that smirk gets less convincing with every loss he suffers.

Oratory Skills: Christian dealt Swagger a mortal blow when he publicly called him out for having a speech impediment. Since then, it seems like everyone ridicules Swagger's lisp. Not coincidentally, his stock has dropped ever since. His interviews are short-circuiting his career.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 18

Momentum Going Into '10: With Swagger's skills, he could be the next Kurt Angle, but not if he's going to allow himself to become a punchline with a speech impediment.

THE GREAT KHALI

What He Has Going For Him: Khali is a massive individual with freakish power.

Biggest Knock Against Him: He's slow and plodding, and his offense is limited to basic chops and head vises. Other than the novelty aspect, he doesn't have much going for him.

Ring Presence: It's always impressive when Khali towers above an opponent. But wrestling isn't a height contest. Once the bell rings, Khali becomes decidedly less impressive.

Oratory Skills: He can hardly speak a word of English. Worse yet, his mouthpiece, Ranjin Singh, is no great speaker, either.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 118

Momentum Going Into '10: Khali has won over the fans with his good-natured giant act and his Kiss-Cam antics. The unfortunate tradeoff is that becoming a fan favorite has taken him off the title track. No one wants to see a Kane/Khali feud, and there's not many more appealing options for Khali on the horizon. He doesn't have much momentum at all. His best bet is to find a permanent tag team partner, one who has the speed and technical prowess to complement his strength. He's not a monster any more; he's a novelty. And novelty acts don't have a long shelf life.

YOSHI TATSU

What He Has Going For Him: Yoshi Tatsu is an expert striker with a high-octane offense. He is one of the most exciting faces of the ECW "New Talent Initiative."

Biggest Knock Against Him: Tatsu will have an uphill battle in breaking out of the undercard ranks, simply because English is not his native language and because WWE doesn't place much stock in the puroresu style in which he was trained.

Ring Presence: Tatsu has a unique look and a fast-paced, crowd-pleasing style. He's still somewhat rough around the edges and lacks a "big league" presence.

Oratory Skills: Tatsu hasn't been given many opportunities to speak, and that's a good indication that he's still uncomfortable with the English language. We wish we could say that the ability to speak English was less important than pure wrestling ability, but in WWE, it's essential if he ever wants to be taken seriously.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 219

Momentum Going Into '10: Tatsu already defied the odds by getting through FCW and getting the coveted call-up to the WWE roster. He has scored wins over Shelton Benjamin and others, and has a growing fan base, but we don't see him progressing beyond his current role.

DANIELS

What He Has Going For Him: Daniels has been a perennial big name on the indy circuit for many years. Now, he is one of the most respected and dynamic wrestlers in TNA. He is always striving to wow the fans with exciting moves and big-time performances.

Biggest Knock Against Him: Rarely has a wrestler of Daniels' caliber achieved so little. Being loyal to the company is admirable, but Daniels needs to get a TNA title belt around his waist. Without it, he's merely going to fade away in to nothing. He may love the fans, but they will turn on him soon if he can't produce the gold.

Ring Presence: He always knows where he is in the ring, as if he has eyes in the back of his head. His lateral movement and quickness are unequalled. It's obvious he spends a lot of time in the ring training.

Oratory Skills: Any wrestling hopeful out there would be well served by studying Daniels' promos. Confident, articulate, and engaging, Daniels is a top-notch promo man.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 58

Momentum Going Into '10: Daniels hade a huge impact when he returned to battle the Main Event Mafia. But instead of gunning for Angle's title, he's wasting time against World Elite and Samoa Joe. He's finally in a position to contend for the World title, and he's failing.

KENNY OMEGA

What He Has Going For Him: At a well-proportion 6' and 200 pounds, he's big enough to compete against the heavyweights, but he has the speed of a cruiserweight, which allows him to keep pace with many speedy ROH superstars.

Biggest Knock Against Him: Omega has not faced a particularly high quality of opposition. He has traveled throughout the indy circuit, with stops in Japan and the WWE developmental system, but he is still untested against many of ROH's top names.

Ring Presence: Omega looks relaxed when wrestling. Part of that comes from the belief that he can end a match quickly with his Aoi Shoudou (brainbuster) or Croyt's Wrath (electric chair into a German suplex). Confidence is an invaluable intangible and Omega has plenty of it.

Oratory Skills: Omega truly excels in this area because he's a natural ham. He can be silly, corny, serious, or playful, depending on his mood. He has great timing and facial expressions, and has the ability to take over an interview segment and shine.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 318

Momentum Going Into '10: Omega is exactly the sort of wrestler ROH likes. He's talented and can compete against a variety of competition and he has enough personality to stand out. That being said, he's a long way off from being considered a top contender. He needs to bust out of the preliminary ranks.

WINNER: DANIELS

Daniels edges out Swagger as the best overall wrestler of this group, and he blows away the competition when it comes to promo ability and overall value. He's a main event performer who—somehow—is locked out of the main event picture.

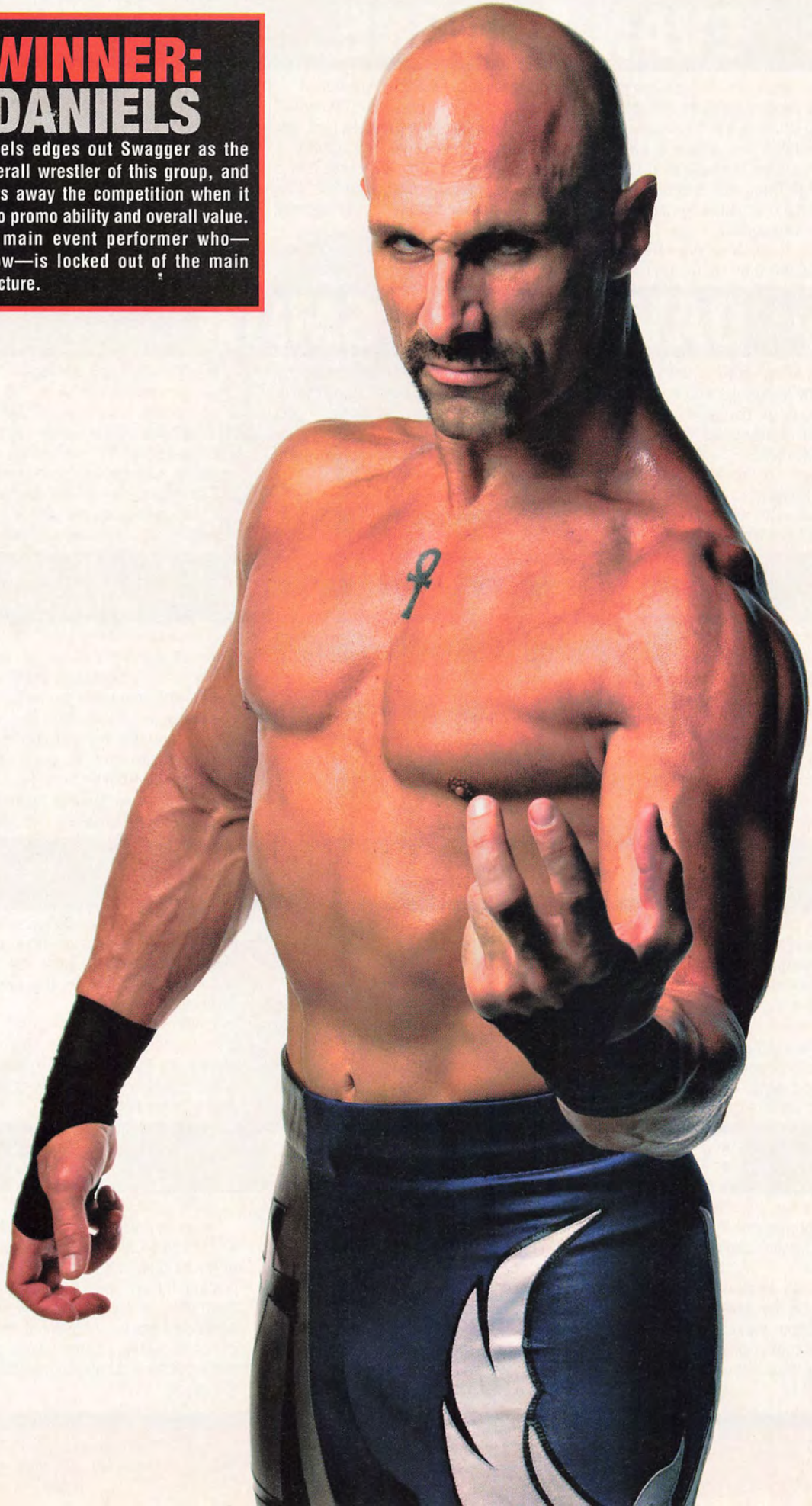


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

EVAN BOURNE

What He Has Going For Him: Bourne is one of the most exciting WWE newcomers in years. His 450 splash is a thing of beauty, but his diving double-knee attack is even more impressive. He has the looks to attract the ladies, the high-flying moves to thrill the kids, and the technical skills to impress event the most jaded purists.

Biggest Knock Against Him: He's a small man, and the Raw roster is not a friendly place for undersized wrestlers.

Ring Presence: Bourne is dynamic, energetic, and uses the ropes to give him every advantage he can get. The problem is that one mistimed jump can cost him a match ... or worse. A rolled ankle cost him several months, and his style is guaranteed to result in more injuries.

Oratory Skills: He's soft-spoken and comes across as a likeable guy. He doesn't stand out, but he gets the job done.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 63

Momentum Going Into '10: In Bourne's debut on Raw, he was one of the three wrestlers selected to face Randy Orton. Bourne shined for a couple minutes before succumbing to the champ. Other losses followed, which hurt his appeal. Hopefully, a feud against Chavo Guerrero Jr. can right the ship.

DAVID HART SMITH

What He Has Going For Him: Hart is a big, strong athlete who literally grew up in a wrestling ring. Trained by the Hart family, Smith is driven to follow in his relatives' footsteps and blaze new ground in WWE.

Biggest Knock Against Him: Despite all that experience, Smith has a tendency to second-guess himself in the ring. He needs to be more forceful and confident.

Ring Presence: Smith seems to be walking on eggshells sometimes. Maybe He's afraid to make a mistake. Fortunately, his partner, Tyson Kidd, seems to have more confidence, which helps Smith, who often seems lost without his partner beside him.

Oratory Skills: Like his father, Davey Boy, David is not a great interview. He's not awful, just uncomfortable with a mike in is face. Again, he benefits from Kidd's presence.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 130

Momentum Going Into '10: Smith and Kidd still need a little more experience before they can claim the tag belts. It's time for them to stop living off the Hart family name and begin making their own history. They need to be more aggressive, pick more fights, and get more attention. Nothing is going to be handed to them.

EZEKIEL JACKSON

What He Has Going For Him: The former bodyguard is a wall of muscle and sinew. He's nasty, irritable, and one of the most powerful men in the sport.

Biggest Knock Against Him: No one knows if he can take a punch to the jaw or if he has any ground game at all. His stamina is questionable and his mat wrestling skills are a mystery. How much of his unbreakable aura is just smoke and mirrors?

Ring Presence: There's no question Jackson is imposing. He has some jarring slams in his repertoire, and he looks impressive, but he's still untested. His true capabilities remain to be seen.

Oratory Skills: Jackson doesn't speak ... he glowers. Be it Brian Kendrick or William Regal, Jackson has always had someone else do the talking for him.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 142

Momentum Going Into '10: There are plenty of questions as to their long-term viability, but Jackson and Vladimir Kozlov make a very impressive tag team, especially with Regal as their mentor. Regal is savvy and Kozlov and Jackson are dangerous enough to carry out his plans. We're not ready to compare them to The Road Warriors quite yet, but give them some time to gain some experience.

MICK FOLEY

What He Has Going For Him: The hardcore icon has name recognition, a rabid cult following, and mainstream appeal. He's also willing to spill blood, put himself through tables, or tear flesh with barbed-wire.

Biggest Knock Against Him: Foley is nowhere near the wrestler he once was. The sad irony of Foley's career is that his greatest in-ring success (in WWE) came after injuries and age had slowed him considerably. Even Foley will admit that he's not the wrestler he once was, though his drive and passion haven't wavered one bit.

Ring Presence: Foley has the superstar cache and a unique ability to connect with his audience. Sure, you can mock his "cheap pops," but Foley always makes it a point to engage his audience. That's indispensable when establishing ring presence, which he has in abundance.

Oratory Skills: Foley has a justified reputation as one of the great promo men in wrestling. When he's on his game, few can touch him. However, in TNA, he does far too much clowning around.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 34

Momentum Going Into '10: Foley is unlikely to regain the TNA World title any time soon, but he'll always be in the thick of things as the executive shareholder.

BRENT ALBRIGHT

What He Has Going For Him: The former NWA heavyweight champion is a gritty wrestler with a high pain threshold and a deep arsenal of submission holds.

Biggest Knock Against Him: He is so consumed with his mat wrestling ability that he overlooks other aspects of his game, such as marketability, promos, and self-promotion. He has allowed himself to become overlooked.

Ring Presence: Albright has a physique that makes him stand out on the independent circuit, where he frequently faces smaller opposition. His credentials are not to be questioned, but he comes across as low-key and unassuming.

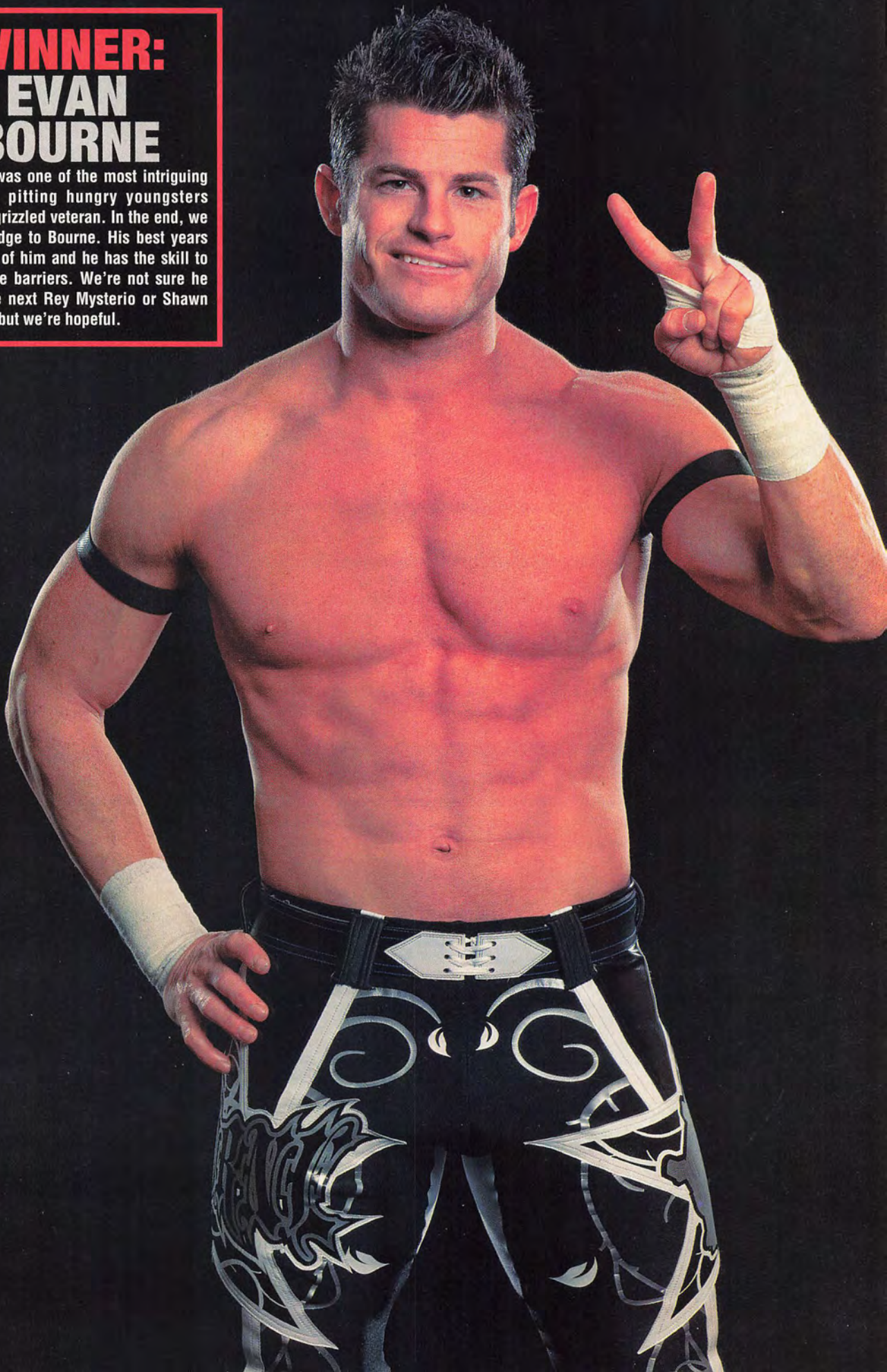
Oratory Skills: Albright carefully selects his words and speaks with a direct intensity when riled. He's a serviceable, but unspectacular, promo man.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 89

Momentum Going Into '10: Albright is on the short list of contenders for the Ring of Honor title, but he needs to do more to position himself for title shots. He's something of an introvert, and if he doesn't do something drastic to break out, he's in danger of spending another year in the exact same position he has occupied for the past few years.

WINNER: EVAN BOURNE

This was one of the most intriguing face-offs, pitting hungry youngsters against a grizzled veteran. In the end, we give the edge to Bourne. His best years are ahead of him and he has the skill to shatter size barriers. We're not sure he can be the next Rey Mysterio or Shawn Michaels, but we're hopeful.



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CODY RHODES

What He Has Going For Him: Cody has inherited his father's tenacity and determination, and is in far better physical condition. As part of Legacy, he is one-third of the Raw brand's top heel act and has served as a loyal soldier in Randy Orton's army.

Biggest Knock Against Him: Rhodes willingly subjugates his ambitions for the good of Legacy, and we're starting to think it has less to do with loyalty than cowardice. When Orton attacked his father, Cody did nothing. If a man's not willing to defend his own father, he's not much of a man.

Ring Presence: Rhodes' best asset is his ability to cut off the ring and weaken opponents through double-team attacks. He struggles in one-on-one encounters and frequently makes mental mistakes. He lacks polish but shows promise.

Oratory Skills: Rhodes is the antithesis of his father, who was a trailblazer with his Gospel-based style. Cody speaks plainly and without fanfare, which does nothing for his ring presence.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 48

Momentum Going Into '10: There are clear signs of dissension within Legacy. If Legacy fractures, Rhodes is in trouble. Whereas Legacy seems to be holding DiBiase back, it's what's keeping Rhodes afloat.

TYSON KIDD

What He Has Going For Him: Tyson Kidd is one of the best pound-for-pound wrestlers on the Smackdown roster. He has an exciting offense and plenty of potential to do more.

Biggest Knock Against Him: Kidd is undersized and frequently overpowered. His quickness helps him stick and move with power. But he's in trouble if an opponent gets hold of him.

Ring Presence: He has a good arsenal of kicks and leg whips to floor opponents, and used a variety of locks and holds once an opponent is off his vertical base. He maximizes his efficiency with expert ring positioning.

Oratory Skills: Kidd is the best speaker of the Hart Dynasty, but has a way to go before he can be considered among the best.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 73

Momentum Going Into '10: The Hart Dynasty is probably the best-rounded tandem in WWE, and odds-on favorites to win the Unified tag title at some point. But they don't match up well against current champions, The Big Show and Chris Jericho. Kidd and Smith are waiting for an opportunity to claim the championship they feel is a birthright, but the competition for those belts is fierce. They're going to need some breaks along the way.

TYLER REKS

What He Has Going For Him: The easy-going surfer has the physical size and personality to make a splash in ECW.

Biggest Knock Against Him: A fun-loving surfer boy will have trouble surviving in an extreme environment. Why do you think Sandman ditched the surfboard 15 years ago?

Ring Presence: Not much to speak of yet. Only weeks out of developmental, Reks is still green and a bit awkward in the ring, which is to be expected. He's under significant pressure to improve quickly if he's going to stick to the WWE main roster.

Oratory Skills: Reks is the stereotypical relaxed surfer dude. He hasn't been given enough opportunities to speak in ECW to give a more comprehensive assessment of his promo skills, dude.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 156

Momentum Going Into '10: Reks has looked impressive in FCW. At 250 pounds, he's blessed with good size, and he has a gimmick that helps him stand out. The next three months will give us a good idea of what the future holds. With a bit more seasoning, Reks could be an ECW title contender, but he's not at that level yet.

KEVIN NASH

What He Has Going For Him: A former WWF and WCW World champion, Nash has been a dominant force for nearly 15 years. He draws controversy but he also creates intrigue. His experience gives TNA credibility.

Biggest Knock Against Him: Age. Nash used to be Diesel-powered, but now he's running on fumes. He has slowed considerably, and now makes no bones about the fact that money is his only motivating force. He's looking for a fat paycheck, and he's not likely to work any harder than he's paid to. Also, he carries a reputation for being a destabilizing locker room influence

Ring Presence: Nash has faced the biggest names in wrestling—from Shawn Michaels to Goldberg, and Sting to Kurt Angle. He's a bona fide main-event competitor

Oratory Skills: Nash is known for speaking his mind and damning the consequences. He doesn't take himself—or anyone else—too seriously, and that lends itself to some fun and controversial interviews.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 105

Momentum Going Into '10: Nash is content to be the enforcer of the Main Event Mafia … and to wear a secondary championship. The only thing that might break him out of his comfort zone would be a WWE return and reunion with Michaels, and that's unlikely.

D-LO BROWN

What He Has Going For Him: This charismatic veteran is schooled in a variety of styles, has name recognition, and is a proven draw that forces younger wrestlers to raise their game when facing him.

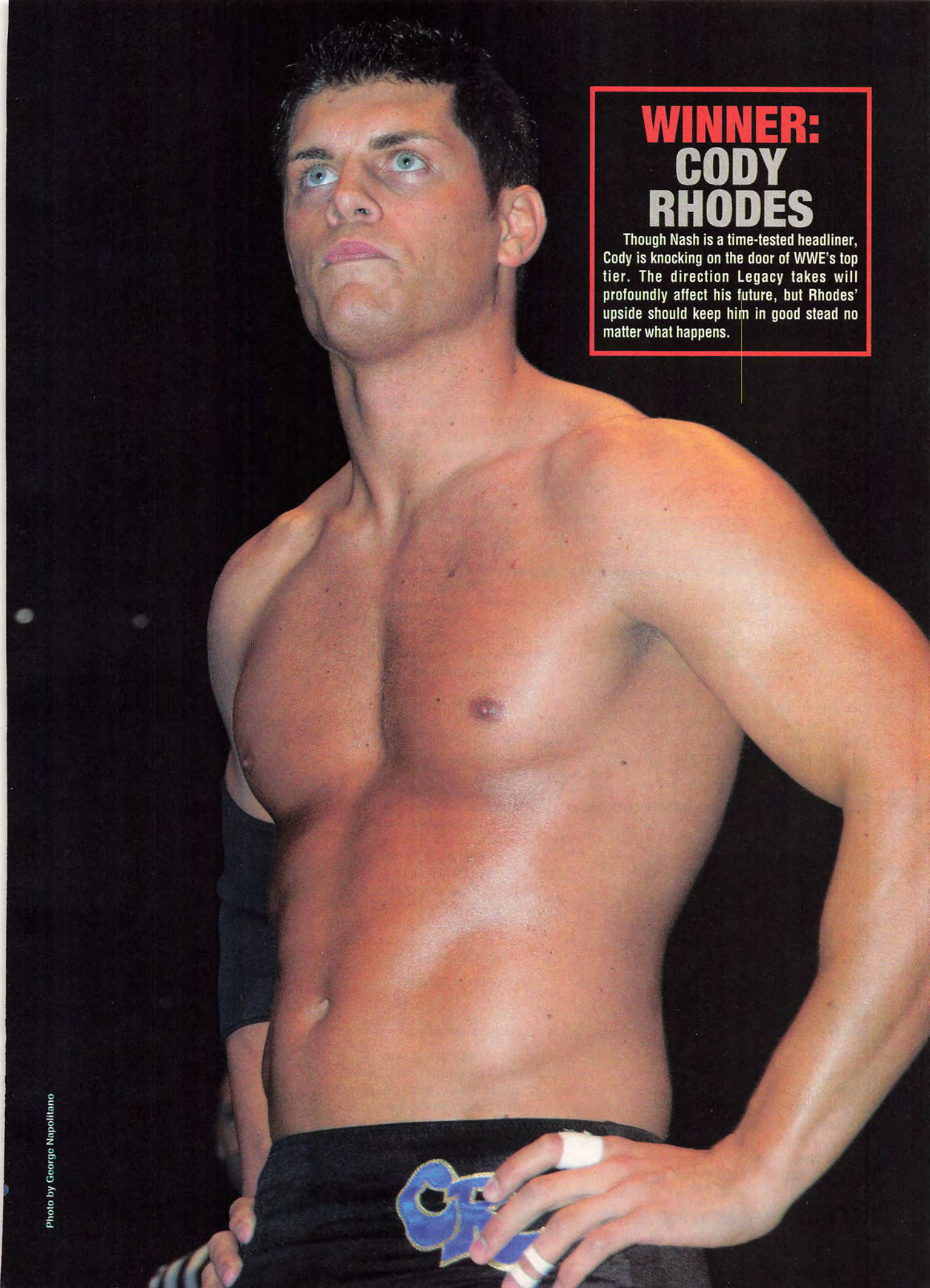
Biggest Knock Against Him: ROH is just the latest stop for him after runs in WWE, Japan, and all over the independent circuit. It begs the question whether Brown is in ROH to stay, or if he's only making a pit stop before his next destination. From a technical point of view, the pudgy Brown has been known to tire easily in the ring.

Ring Presence: Brown is charismatic and is recognized for his prior accomplishments in WWE. He has a star quality that some other ROH competitors lack. He also has the experience from globetrotting and rarely makes a mental mistake or gets caught out of position.

Oratory Skills: A great and non-stoptalker with natural charisma, Brown engages the audience and draws interest in his matches through his interviews. His mouth doesn't stop moving from bell to bell.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 201

Momentum Going Into '10: There's a youth movement in ROH, and Brown doesn't really fit in. After the championship reign of fellow veteran Jerry Lynn, it seems unlikely Brown would wind up with the ROH title. He fills a good role as a former WWE star that could mentor ROH's younger hands, but he's unlikely to break out of that role.



WINNER: CODY RHODES

Though Nash is a time-tested headliner, Cody is knocking on the door of WWE's top tier. The direction Legacy takes will profoundly affect his future, but Rhodes' upside should keep him in good stead no matter what happens.

Photo by George Napolitano

CHRIS MASTERS

What He Has Going For Him: An incredible physical specimen, Masters is an old-school throwback to the likes of fellow full-nelson specialists Ken Patera, Hercules Hernandez, and Billy Jack Haynes.

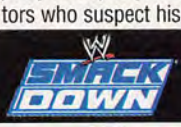
Biggest Knock Against Him: Masters is a one-move wrestler who tires quickly. Plus, his violations of the WWE Wellness Policy have justly or unjustly drawn criticism from detractors who suspect his eye-catching physique is somewhat less than natural.

Ring Presence: With his dramatic ring entrance and splendid build, fans find it difficult not to fix their eyes on him. But once the bell rings, there's usually very little to hold their attention for long. How many times can he clamp on a full-nelson and expect the fans to pop for it?

Oratory Skills: Masters is an underrated speaker. He's confident, well-spoken, and intense, though his interviews typically lack flash.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 393

Momentum Going Into '10: Masters' return to WWE was a surprise, and it will be a surprise if he remains with the company for long. With a damaged reputation and one-dimensional offense fans may be tired of, there's little upside for Masters in the company. He needs to diversify his game ... or else.



MIKE KNOX

What He Has Going For Him: Brutish and nasty, Knox is earning comparisons to legendary madman Bruiser Brody.

Biggest Knock Against Him: Knox is a variation on a theme. He's a big, nasty heel cut from the same cloth as Kane, Snitsky, and a half-dozen other bruisers through the years. Like Knox, those wrestlers are bullies who never seem to accomplish much before fizzling out. Knox has done nothing to make the fans see him any differently.

Ring Presence: Knox has a unique look and a foreboding presence. He can steamroll smaller wrestlers but is much less effective against wrestlers that can match his power or have the technical skills to mitigate his strength.

Oratory Skills: Recently, instead of yelling and screaming, Knox has portrayed himself as a cultured individual that simply enjoys hurting people. That makes him much more interesting, and gives his character a complexity the other behemoths have lacked.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 87

Momentum Going Into '10: WWE has always had a soft spot for huge, physical specimens that can flatten opponents. Knox fills that role, and he fills it well, but don't expect any championship reigns anytime soon. At this point in his career, Mike Knox simply is not a top-tier wrestler.

SHELTON BENJAMIN

What He Has Going For Him: Arguably the most athletically gifted wrestler in ECW. Quick on his feet and with impeccable amateur credentials, Benjamin's a three-time Intercontinental champion, two-time tag champion, and former U.S. champion.

Biggest Knock Against Him: Benjamin has been on the cusp of greatness for five years and he has never been able to take that next step. He lacks a killer instinct.

Ring Presence: Few wrestlers can match Benjamin's blend of mat wrestling and aerial attack. He is well-rounded, but can be terribly inconsistent. A few years ago, he wrestled Shawn Michaels in a Match-of-the-Year caliber performance. A few months ago, Yoshi Tatsu kayoed him.

Oratory Skills: Benjamin has improved considerably, but he's never been a great speaker. He seems to lack conviction. We get the impression he's a humble guy trying hard to be an arrogant heel. It comes off as disingenuous.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 31

Momentum Going Into '10: He's feuding with Tyler Reks when he should be contending for the ECW title. He's squandering his gifts, and it's a shame. We've been waiting for that to change, but there's no indication it will.

BOOKER T

What He Has Going For Him: Booker has been one of the sport's biggest stars for more than 15 years. He has forgotten more about wrestling than most wrestlers will ever learn.

Biggest Knock Against Him: These days, he takes short cuts, ducks challenges, and takes the easy way out whenever possible. That's a far cry from the attitude he had in his Harlem Heat days.

Ring Presence: Booker has proven himself in every promotion in which he has appeared. He's a perennial World title contender and is seen as such by both the fans and his peers.

Oratory Skills: He may be hard to understand at times with his bizarre pseudo accents, but Booker always delivers energetic and entertaining promos. He has terrific comic timing. He's one of the most consistently great promo men in the sport.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 38

Momentum Going Into '10: Booker T is comfortable in the Mafia, and it has worked out well for him. He has held the Legends title and the tag team title, and more titles are likely to come his way as long as the Mafia is in control. A feud against Angle for the World title would be intriguing, but it's not likely to happen.

SONJAY DUTT

What He Has Going For Him: The former TNA star is a master of quick, precision chain-wrestling moves and unique takedowns. He is a dynamic wrestler with a lucha-inspired offense and a national reputation from his TNA days.

Biggest Knock Against Him: He can be arrogant and self-centered to a fault. He very good, but not quite as good as he thinks he is.

Ring Presence: The strongest part of Dutt's game is his ability to think several moves ahead. When he executes a move, he seamlessly transitions into another move or hold, or a series of holds in rapid succession. He has a unique ability to "stick" to his opponent, holding fast to transition from one move to another, which keeps opponents off-balance.

Oratory Skills: Dutt can be a grating, condescending jerk ... in fact, that's when he's at his best.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 149

Momentum Going Into '10: Dutt has made several appearances in ROH, but he's not a core member of the company. He's too small to get an opportunity in WWE and was released by TNA. Barring a long-term agreement with ROH or a contract overseas, Dutt's long-term prospects do not look good.

WINNER: BOOKER T

Booker has the Midas touch. The man always wins championships and fights his way to the top. He is an overachiever in a pack of underachievers.

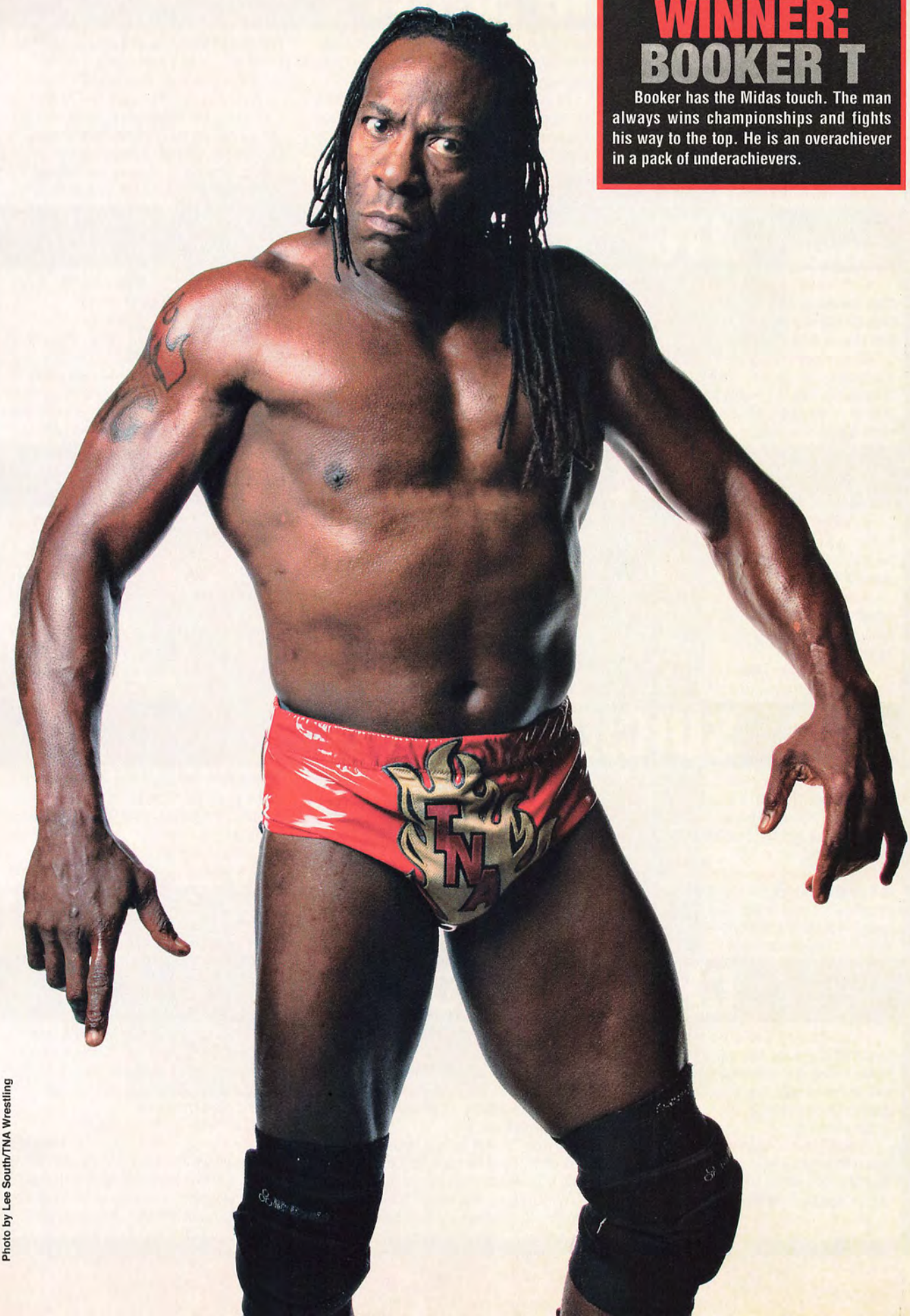


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

THE BIG SHOW

What He Has Going For Him: Billed at 7'5" and more than 400 pounds, The Big Show is a legitimate giant. He's a threat to any championship he deigns to pursue, simply due to his size.

Biggest Knock Against Him: His weight has fluctuated through the years, and the heavier he becomes, the less effective he is.

Ring Presence: Show commands respect. He looms over opponents and takes immediate control of a match. He demands to be taken seriously at all times.

Oratory Skills: Show has developed into a strong speaker. He is relaxed and assertive, and has even shown some comic flair from time to time. There's a reason Show has been involved in high-profile storylines with celebrities like Floyd Mayweather and Shaquille O'Neal. He is well spoken enough to be a good ambassador for WWE ... even if he is a bully.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 56

Momentum Going Into '10: The team of "Jeri-Show" has reinvigorated Show, who was still reeling from the embarrassment of losing to Mayweather last year. Based on Show's usual pattern, periods of success are followed by lengthy slumps, and that seems likely for 2010.

JTG

What He Has Going For Him: An underrated wrestler who blends brawling tactics with innovative takedowns and high-impact moves. Win, lose, or draw, JTG has plenty of heart.

Biggest Knock Against Him: He needs to rely more on his partner, Shad Gaspard, and utilize quicker tags to prevent getting caught out of position and taking a major beating. As the much-bigger man, Gaspard is better built for absorbing punishment.

Ring Presence: JTG shows a lot of energy and keeps the crowd pumped up. He is an electric performer, but he's not particularly ring savvy. JTG has too much energy.

Oratory Skills: JTG's rapid-fire delivery and slang makes for an entertaining combination. He's particularly good at reacting to others and has good comic timing. However, it sometimes seems as if too many promos devolve into the "Money, money" call and response.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 25

Momentum Going Into '10: Cryme Tyme is better off as a team than they would be as singles competitors. They've already been released from WWE once, and could easily be handed their walking papers again, unless they can get on their game and finally win the tag belts.

PAUL BURCHILL

What He Has Going For Him: He has impressive upper body strength and a knack for grinding opponents down for a curb stomp or piledriver variation.

Biggest Knock Against Him: Other wrestlers try their hardest to avoid him, because a night against Burchill promises to be painful.

Ring Presence: Burchill is an understated competitor who prefers to let his wrestling speak for itself. He's a formidable no-frills competitor.

Oratory Skills: The best aspect of Burchill's interviews is that he's usually quite grounded. When he complains about being overlooked by matchmakers, he's usually correct. When he complains about Gregory Helms and Hurricane being one and the same, he's correct. His point of view makes him a sympathetic character, but he appears tp have anger issues and an inability to deal with adversity.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 123

Momentum Going Into '10: Burchill has developed into a prominent part of the ECW roster. With the lovely Katie Lea at his side, Burchill is steadily climbing the ranks. If he can get through his feud with Hurricane without looking too foolish, he could be in a good position to challenge for the ECW title.

SUICIDE

What He Has Going For Him: Suicide's an innovative wrestler with a unique look and an even more unique entrance. His character appeals to kids and his wrestling ability appeals to diehard fans.

Biggest Knock Against Him: Can he really be trusted? There are still a lot of questions surrounding the man in the skull mask. As the main Event Mafia and World Elite grow more powerful, TNA needs wrestlers like Suicide to fight the good fight and represent TNA. But he has been suspiciously absent.

Ring Presence: Suicide has the most dramatic entrance in TNA. He's also a top-notch wrestler with lightning-quick attacks, superior counter-wrestling, and death-defying aerial moves. He captures attention and keeps it whenever he's in the ring.

Oratory Skills: Suicide is a man of few words, and that's a good thing, because his deep-voiced delivery is silly and stilted. He's much more intimidating when he's simply appearing than when he's trying to sound like a tough guy.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 30

Momentum Going Into '10: Suicide had plenty of momentum earlier this year when he was warring with The Motor City Machine Guns and chasing the X division title. Since then, his momentum has badly fallen off.

CHRIS HERO

What He Has Going For Him: Hero's height (6'5") gives him added leverage in power moves and submission holds. He's a solid technician with natural size, superior cardiovascular conditioning, and knockout power ... Hero has it all.

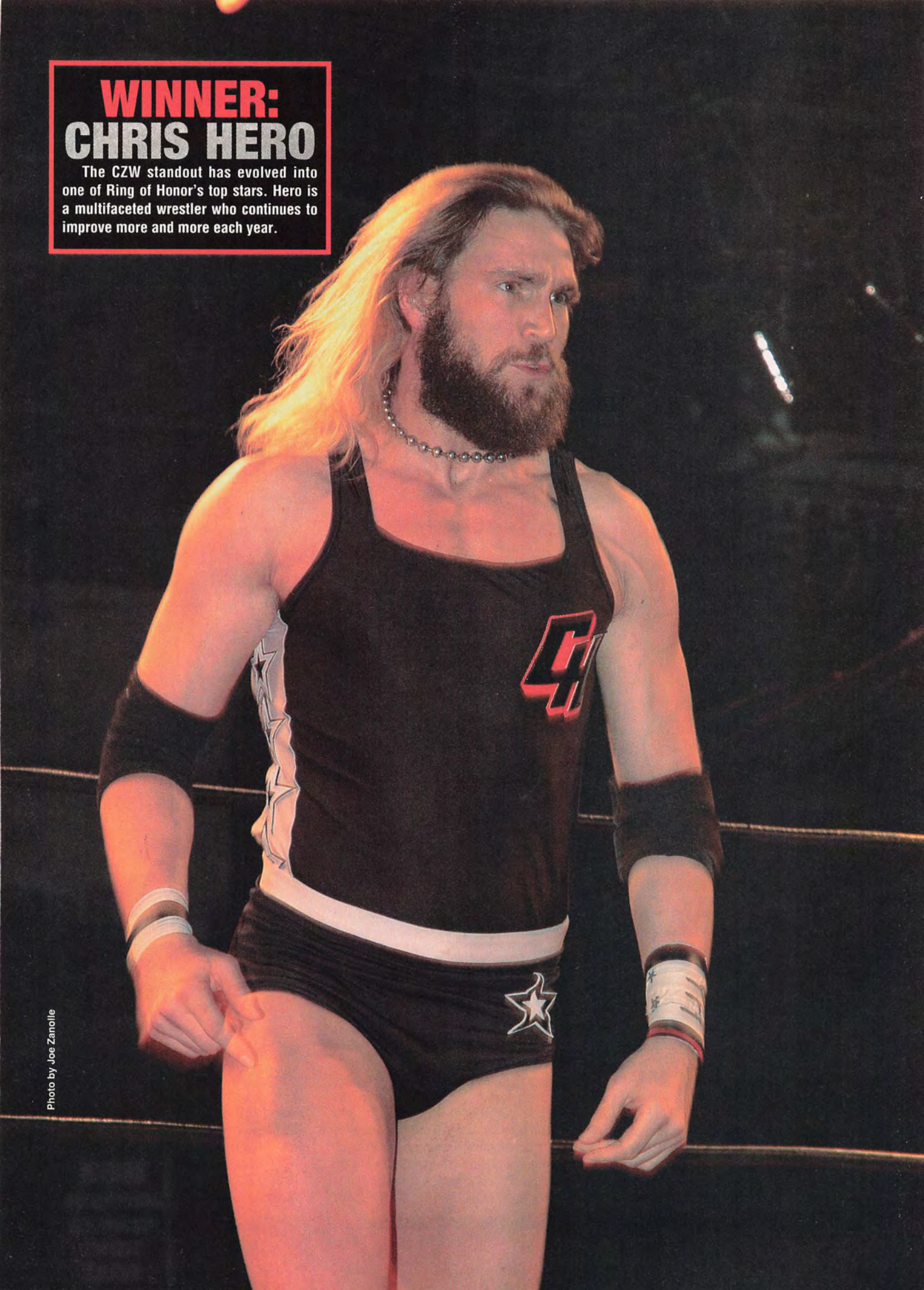
Biggest Knock Against Him: Hero's propensity to bend the rules does him no favors in Ring of Honor, where sportsmanship and athleticism are prized above all else.

Ring Presence: The critics said Hero was too skinny, and that the CZW star wasn't technically skilled enough to survive in ROH. He proved everyone wrong. He has gone the distance with everyone from Bryan Danielson to Lance Storm. It turns out he's every bit as good as he claims to be.

Oratory Skills: Being a great promo man was what helped Hero get his foot in the door with ROH. His promos helped build the epic CZW-ROH feud, and helped take him to the top of both companies. Unfortunately, though, he doesn't speak much in ROH, mainly because Larry Sweeney did most of the talking for everyone associated with Sweet 'n' Sour Inc. But with Sweeney gone, we may start hearing more from Hero.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 70

Momentum Going Into '10: There's a power vacuum at the top of ROH, and Hero is in a great position to capitalize on it. He matches up well against champ Austin Aries and may be ready to claim the ROH championship.



WINNER: CHRIS HERO

The CZW standout has evolved into one of Ring of Honor's top stars. Hero is a multifaceted wrestler who continues to improve more and more each year.

Photo by Joe Zanolle

MARK HENRY

What He Has Going For Him: A former Olympian, Henry has mainstream credibility and near-superhuman power.

Biggest Knock Against Him: His poor cardio conditioning and shallow repertoire offset his strength. Henry is simply not a very good wrestler, though he can make anyone submit if he can catch them.

Ring Presence: To say Henry is slow is being kind. A better adjective would be glacial. No one disputes his power, but it takes more than the ability pick up heavy things to be a wrestler.

Oratory Skills: In the late-1990s, Henry actually showed some flair in interviews, especially back in the "Sexual Chocolate" days. In recent years, he's been a grunting Neanderthal. Maybe some of MVP's charisma will rub off on him.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 45

Momentum Going Into '10: The MVP-Henry team has a lot of potential, and it may be just what Henry needs to break out of his role as the surly strongman with a chip on his shoulder. Tag team wrestling will give him a better opportunity to rest and put his power to better use, without being exposed for his one-dimensional offense and poor stamina.

MATT HARDY

What He Has Going For Him: Despite a career of starts, stops, and humiliations, Matt Hardy is still one of the most popular wrestlers on any WWE brand. He's an exciting performer who is willing to sacrifice his body to please his fans.

Biggest Knock Against Him: Matt's old rallying cry was "I will not die." Not only is that factually inaccurate, but it's also a pretty lame mission statement. Matt should set his goals higher than simply refusing to quit; maybe then he can actually make it to the main event level instead of petering out as he has in his highest profile feuds.

Ring Presence: Matt's not particularly big, he's not a great technician, and he's only a mediocre high-flyer. But he's willing to brawl—and cheat—and never backs down from a challenge.

Oratory Skills: Matt is a lousy interview. His accent, faraway stare, and unintentionally comic over-emoting ruin him.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 20

Momentum Going Into '10: Matt had some momentum as the man who screwed over his own brother, but injuries halted that. After a hasty reunion, he's back in the fans' good graces, but his reputation is still shaky. Being on good terms with I-C champ John Morrison helps repair his image.

ZACK RYDER

What He Has Going For Him: He's fresh, confident, and talented enough to eventually move to either Smackdown or Raw as a singles wrestler.

Biggest Knock Against Him: You'd think a guy with so much confidence might rethink his approach after being schooled by Christian and Shelton Benjamin. He's not arrogant ... he's delusional. Woo woo woo, indeed.

Ring Presence: Ryder must own stock in Day-Glo fabric and bandanas. It makes him stand out, but not necessarily in a good way.

Oratory Skills: So many young talents seem terrified to say the wrong thing once they start doing interviews. Not Ryder. He's been a pleasant surprise, brash and articulate during promos, transitioning from a generic Edge wannabe to one of WWE's most colorful young stars.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 199

Momentum Going Into '10: Ryder has certainly been making waves since being dealt to ECW. He's not making a lot of friends, but he's not afraid to stir the pot and demand matches. He should get some more title shots soon, and it won't take long until he shows up on Monday or Friday nights.

ERIC YOUNG

What He Has Going For Him: Young is a solid wrestler with a Machiavellian mind. After years spent as comic relief, he finally decided to get serious. Within weeks, Young did what the entire Frontline was unable to do in months—break through the glass ceiling to become a power player.

Biggest Knock Against Him: We're not so sure yet whether he can pull off the criminal mastermind persona. Maybe we're just used to seeing him in a comedic role.

Ring Presence: Young is a well-rounded wrestler with old-school panache. He can wrestle fast-paced X division bouts, traditional heavyweight style, and can brawl with the best of them. He's been underrated for a long time.

Oratory Skills: Young has long been a crowd favorite for his funny promos. He knows how to entertain, and he obviously also knows how to antagonize. However, his new character might spell the end of that part of his personality.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 72

Momentum Going Into '10: Young has an opportunity to leapfrog to the top of TNA with World Elite. He has the chops to survive on the main event level, and now that he has an opportunity to showcase those skills, we believe he'll make the most of it.

KENTA

What He Has Going For Him: The Pro Wrestling NOAH and Ring of Honor sensation is one of the best pound-for-pound strikers in the sport and one of the most influential junior heavyweights of this era.

Biggest Knock Against Him: KENTA may be spreading himself too thin. It's impossible to balance schedules in Japan and the U.S. without sacrificing something to jet lag and fatigue. KENTA's in-ring style calls for enormous reserves of energy. He can't afford to spend it all on travel.

Ring Presence: KENTA radiates intensity. The moment he steps into the ring, fans know they're going to see something special.

Oratory Skills: KENTA speaks very little English. Fortunately, in ROH, that's far less important than it is in WWE or TNA, where the ability to cut promos is nearly as important as wrestling ability. So even though his limited speaking skills could be seen as something of an obstacle, it really hasn't negatively affected him just yet.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 74

Momentum Going Into '10: By virtue of his win over Tyler Black at ROH's End of an Age in June, as well as a closely contested loss to Nigel McGuinness (KENTA caused the arm injuries that shelved McGuinness for weeks), KENTA has to be considered a top contender to the ROH title. But unless he's willing to relocate to the U.S. full-time, it's unlikely he'll ever be more than a special attraction in ROH.

WINNER: ERIC YOUNG

This face-off features as diverse a grouping of styles as you're likely to find. Young is making a major mark in TNA and can excel at several wrestling styles, while Henry and KENTA are more limited. If you don't agree, just imagine them trying to wrestle each other.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

THE MIZ

What He Has Going For Him: People will gladly fork over their hard-earned money in hopes of seeing someone clean his clock. That may not help him win any popularity contests, but it does make him a marketable commodity.

Biggest Knock Against Him: He lacks credibility. While he's improved tremendously over the past year, the last two people he publicly called out—John Cena and Kofi Kingston—have both beaten him decisively.

Ring Presence: Miz demands center stage. Few wrestlers with a win-loss record like his have commanded as much TV time, and that's because Miz seeks out the cameras and takes control of the situation.

Oratory Skills: It takes a lot of talent to come off as such a cockroach. Miz is one of the most effective heel interviews anywhere, like it or not.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 56

Momentum Going Into '10: In our "Mid-Year Report," we predicted Miz would win the U.S. title by the end of the year. Time is running out, but we still have faith in him. If he fails that, he could definitely be a dark horse in the MITB match at 'Mania. Fear not, he will get title shots. He is awesome, after all.

SHAD GASPARD

What He Has Going For Him: The enforcer of Cryme Tyme is slow to anger but all too happy to lay the proverbial smack down when necessary. He can handle himself against all comers and has a significant fan base.

Biggest Knock Against Him: Cryme Tyme has underachieved ever since debuting in WWE. Considering Shad's size and strength, one would think he would have accomplished something—anything—of significance over the past two years. We're still waiting, and our expectations are pretty low.

Ring Presence: Shad is the big dog you don't want to cross. He's generally relaxed and more interested in playing to the crowd than fighting, but he can fight like a devil once he's riled.

Oratory Skills: Big Shad is usually the straight man to JTG's manic firebrand. He would struggle mightily without JTG by his side.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 95

Momentum Going Into '10: Cryme Tyme is finally contending for the tag title, which is a step in the right direction. Other than that, all they've ever achieved was stealing some stuff and befriending Cena and Shaq. If they don't win the belts soon, their long-term prospects aren't good. And if they split up, we predict JTG will be the singles star.

THE HURRICANE

What He Has Going For Him: Gregory Helms is a superior wrestler that also has cult appeal and a proven track record as a merchandise mover.

Biggest Knock Against Him: The Hurricane has missed a lot of time to injuries, and we're not entirely convinced he'll ever be at 100 percent again. He is also somewhat undersized.

Ring Presence: As The Hurricane, Helms immediately gets the fans' attention because they can't wait to see what crazy antics he'll engage in next. He also has a knack for playing mind games with opponents and winning the mental battles that lead to the Hurri-pin. As Gregory Helms, he's known as an all-around solid cruiserweight grappler.

Oratory Skills: A lifelong comic book fan, Helms brings over-the-top narration and comic book bravado to the table. It makes him a one-of-a-kind, thoroughly entertaining commodity.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 193

Momentum Going Into '10: The Hurricane is a crowd-pleasing character, but he's played exclusively for laughs. He can be a fun attraction, but that's about the most we see him achieving in the near future. Don't expect him to contend for any titles anytime soon, unless he reprises his tag team with Kane.

SCOTT STEINER

What He Has Going For Him: Experience. Pedigree. Physique. Few wrestlers have accomplished even half of what Steiner has ... and he still possesses one of the sport's freakiest physiques.

Biggest Knock Against Him: He's injury prone. Steiner made a major gamble when he added so much muscle mass in the late-1990s. Ten years later, all that muscle has made him virtually immobile.

Ring Presence: Steiner is still a master intimidator. His Steinerline is ferocious, and he puts plenty of torque on everything from headlocks to his Steiner Recliner.

Oratory Skills: There was a time when Steiner was one of the most controversial interviews in the game. He's softened considerably these days, but he still throws out some funny lines. Who else but Steiner would tell a seething Samoa Joe to go eat another Twinkie?

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 71

Momentum Going Into '10: At this stage of his career, tag teaming suits Steiner perfectly. He and Booker can have a long run together, providing Steiner avoids injury.

DAVEY RICHARDS

What He Has Going For Him: He is a volatile—but skilled—wrestler in the mold of Chris Benoit and The Dynamite Kid. He has that elusive "it" factor in the ring.

Biggest Knock Against Him: Richards takes too many chances. Instead of utilizing low-risk, high-reward moves, he frequently attempts ill-timed suicide dives and shooting star presses. Just because he can execute those moves doesn't mean he should attempt them in every match. Richards' Devil-may-care attitude seems to be a function of his inability to control his emotions.

Ring Presence: Like Benoit, Richards oozes intensity from bell to bell. He will never drop a match—or even a fall—out of indifference or laziness. Fans know when Davey Richards is in the ring! Bombastic style and aggressive personality make him an entertaining part of *ROH On HDNet*.

Oratory Skills: Richards gets right to the point. He likes to lay out the facts. He'll tell you what he has done, what he's about to do, and what he's going to do in the future. Not a lot of style, but plenty of substance. He's also fond of dealing out a steady pattern of insults to opponents from the pre-match introductions to the post-match promo. He has recently taken to howling during American Wolves' interviews.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 77

Momentum Going Into '10: Richards is the reigning FIP champion and one-half of the ROH tag champions (with Eddie Edwards). He's one of Ring of Honor's most valuable talents, and is likely to be one of the men to fill the void when Danielson and McGuinness leave for WWE.

WINNER: DAVEY RICHARDS

Richards is the most balanced wrestler of the five. He's suffered fewer injuries, is in better cardiovascular shape, and has the deepest move set. He wins in every category.

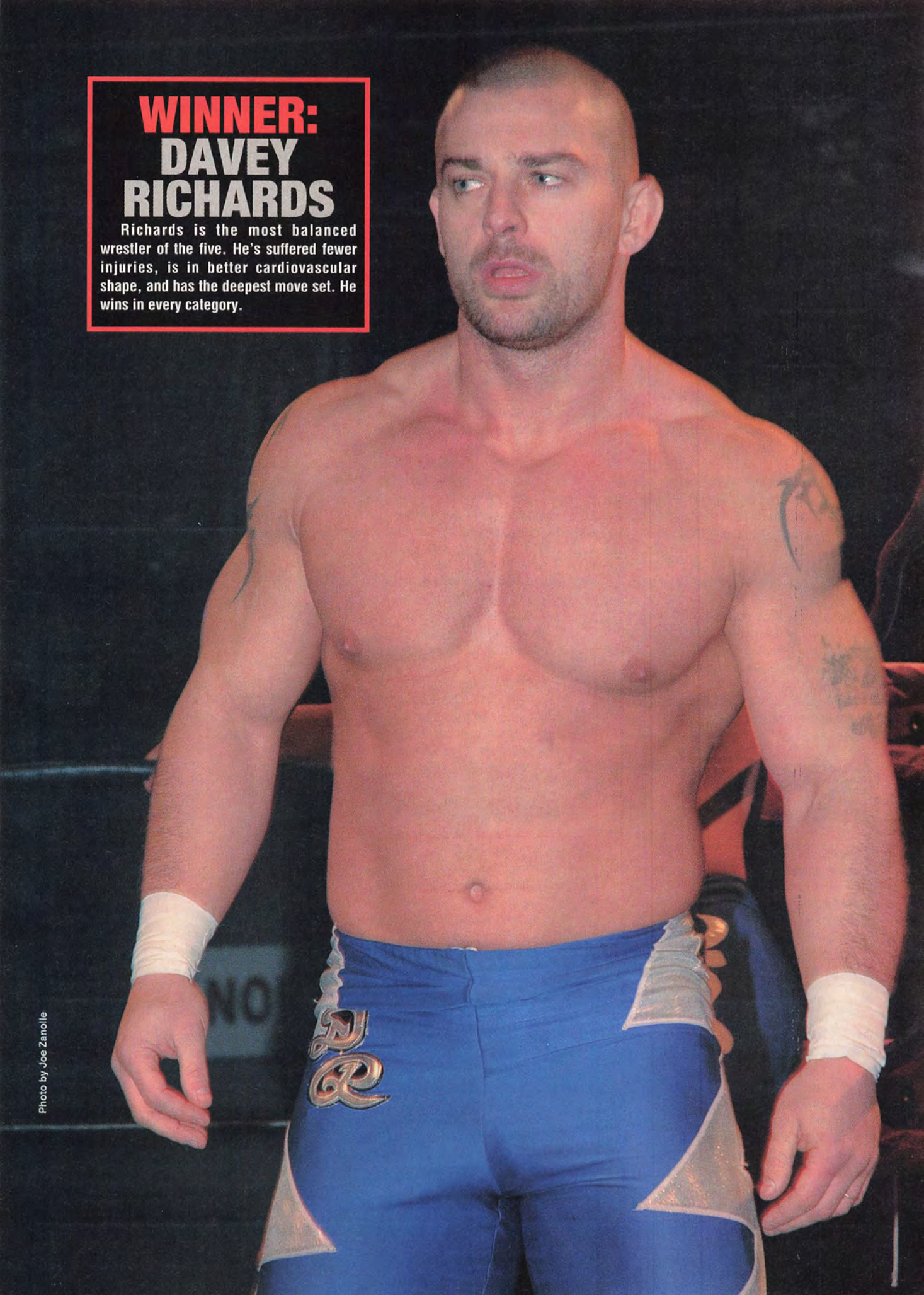


Photo by Joe Zanolle

CARLITO

What He Has Going For Him: Carlito has accomplished a tremendous amount during a relatively short time in WWE. The second-generation star is a former Intercontinental, U.S., and tag team champion. He's been a protégé of Ric Flair, pinned John Cena and unified the Raw and Smackdown tag titles.

Biggest Knock Against Him: Carlito seems to have absolutely no passion or motivation. Considering his pedigree and the early scouting report, he should have won a few world titles by now. Instead, he's barely cracking Raw's top 15. There's also a question of his attitude. He tends to sulk and pout, sometimes publicly when things don't go his way.

Ring Presence: Even Carlito's body language reveals his lack of desire. He slumps his shoulders, rarely plays to the audience, and seldom even breaks a sweat in the ring.

Oratory Skills: Carlito can be a funny interview every once in a while, but it takes more than spitting apples to be a good promo man.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 64

Momentum Going Into '10: Carlito seemed energized when his kid brother, Primo, came around and they were vying for the affections of The Bella Twins. But Carlito inexplicably self-destructed and alienated the Bellas as well as his brothers. If he weren't such a big draw in Puerto Rico, and WWE had less respect for his father, Carlos, he'd have been handed his walking papers long ago.

CHARLIE HAAS

What He Has Going For Him: He's a very underrated wrestler who knows the importance of delivering entertainment. The Seton Hall standout has impeccable collegiate credentials, but is willing to get silly to entertain the fans.

Biggest Knock Against Him: Haas has gone through so many half-hearted incarnations that fans have learned not to take him seriously anymore. During his mimic stage, he was regularly beaten in brief, forgettable matches.

Ring Presence: It's notable that Haas chose to impersonate famous wrestlers when he wanted to stand out. It's because, at heart, he's an unassuming, quiet guy. Instead of drawing attention to himself, he's more comfortable—and more entertaining—impersonating others. It was a short-term fix that got some attention but ultimately didn't help his innate lack of charisma.

Oratory Skills: Haas is quick on his feet when it comes to wrestling, but his interviews leave a lot to be desired.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 122

Momentum Going Into '10: With the right manager or the right gimmick, Haas could have been the next Mr. Perfect. It just never worked out for him, and things aren't going to change now.

D.J. GABRIEL

What He Has Going For Him: ECW's resident private dancer has an incredible physique and a unique, European-based ring style. He has model good looks and wicked knockout power with his flying European uppercut.

Biggest Knock Against Him: Gabriel's little dance routine was a lousy gimmick, and now that Alicia Fox has split with him, Gabriel has gone missing.

Ring Presence: Gabriel's dancing and the presence of the beautiful Alicia Fox garnered attention that should really have gone toward his wrestling skills. His impressive upper body strength perfectly complemented his tight, striking style. Unfortunately, no one seemed to notice with all that dancing going on.

Oratory Skills: Gabriel is a very articulate Brit who can turn a phrase and come across as either a humble, hard-working guy or a prissy snob, depending on his mood. Too bad he rarely got a chance to exercise his pipes.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 182

Momentum Going Into '10: Right now, Gabriel is lucky to still have a spot on the ECW roster. Maybe it's because the front office forgot he was still drawing a paycheck. Unless he gets completely repackaged, he might be released by the time you read these words. With a new gimmick or WWE Diva on his arm, he could go far.

ABYSS

What He Has Going For Him: A hardcore master with enormous power, Abyss will go to any lengths to deliver unforgettable matches.

Biggest Knock Against Him: He's nuts. He has the brain of a child inside the body of a butcher. His desire to spill blood, whether his opponents' or his own, often gets in the way of victory. Plus, because of his mental state, Abyss is deeply impressionable and easily influenced.

Ring Presence: With his sheer size and foreboding mask, Abyss can be a horrifying visage. Both opponents and fans know that Abyss wants nothing more than to spill blood. When Abyss gets to the ring, people get excited, and the squeamish become uncomfortable.

Oratory Skills: Once decried as a knockoff hybrid of Mankind and Kane, Abyss has actually been delivering better promos than both those wrestlers in recent months. He may be tortured and half nuts, but he's also endearing and sweet. He's one of TNA's most compelling characters.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 96

Momentum Going Into '10: We admit we were skeptical when Abyss became a fan favorite, but he actually excels in the role. It looks like Foley might take Abyss under his wing, and if that happens, Abyss could be the man who destroys the Main Event Mafia once and for all.

DELIRIOUS

What He Has Going For Him: He is one of ROH's most marketable attractions. The masked man from the Edge of Sanity is both a raving madman and one of Ring of Honor's best technical stars. Delirious can be zany and play a role, but he can also deliver four-star matches.

Biggest Knock Against Him: Can anyone really envision Delirious as ROH champion? We don't mean to knock his abilities, but he's not exactly what the company that prizes no-frills athletic competition would want as its standard-bearer.

Ring Presence: Delirious is a ball of otherworldly energy, a manic buzzsaw. He goes a mile a minute and forces opponents to ratchet up their speed just to keep up with him.

Oratory Skills: Deciphering Delirious' promos is a frustrating endeavor. But other than the fact that he doesn't make a lick of sense, we defy you to find a more entertaining promo man. Go ahead … we'll wait.

2009 "*PWI* 500" Ranking: 131

Momentum Going Into '10: Delirious is a prominent attraction in Ring of Honor, but he's a utility player. He's entertaining, and his promos are great, but he's never going to progress beyond his current role in that company.

WINNER: ABYSS

The man-mountain has sacrificed his body for TNA. He's a former world champion who still has plenty of upside potential, and he's one of the spookiest guys in the business.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

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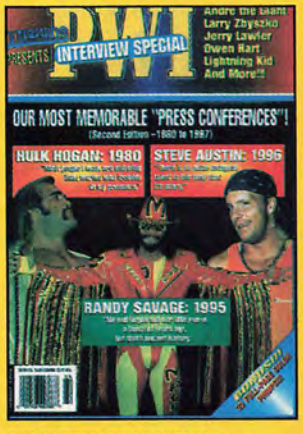

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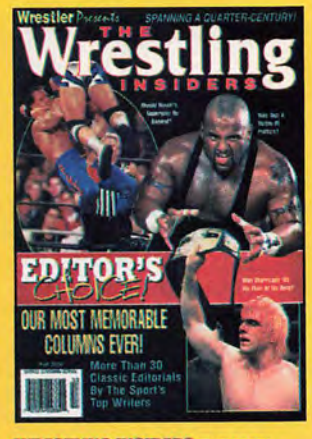
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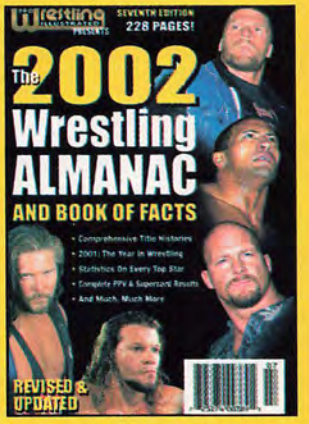

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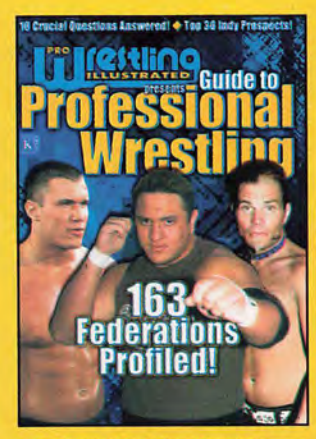

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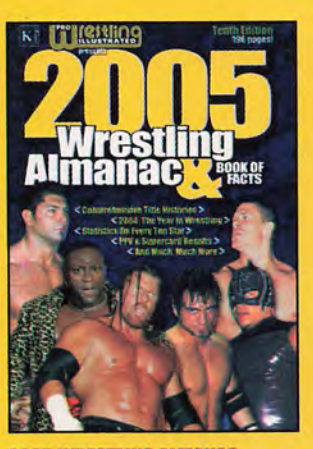

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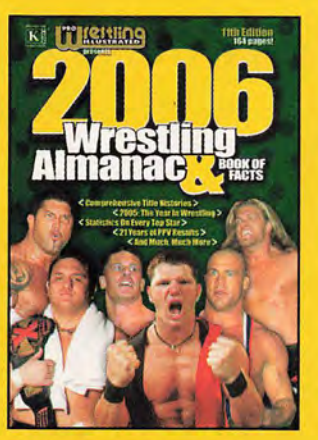

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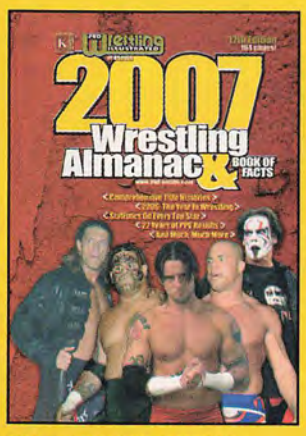

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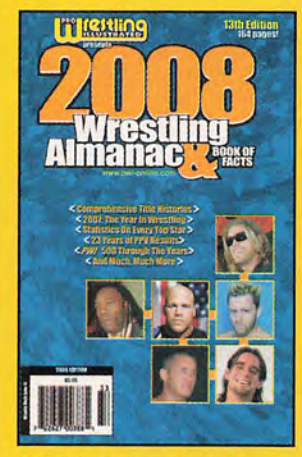

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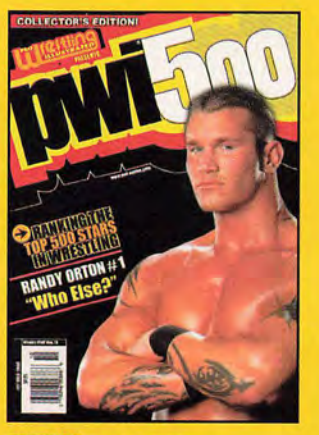

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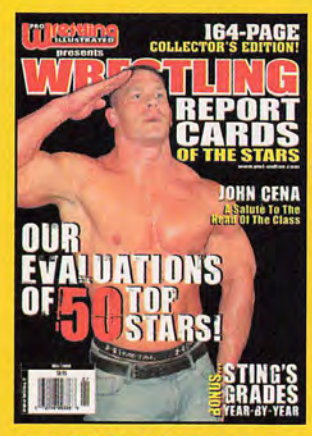
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Anti-Americanism Runs Rampant in Wrestling...

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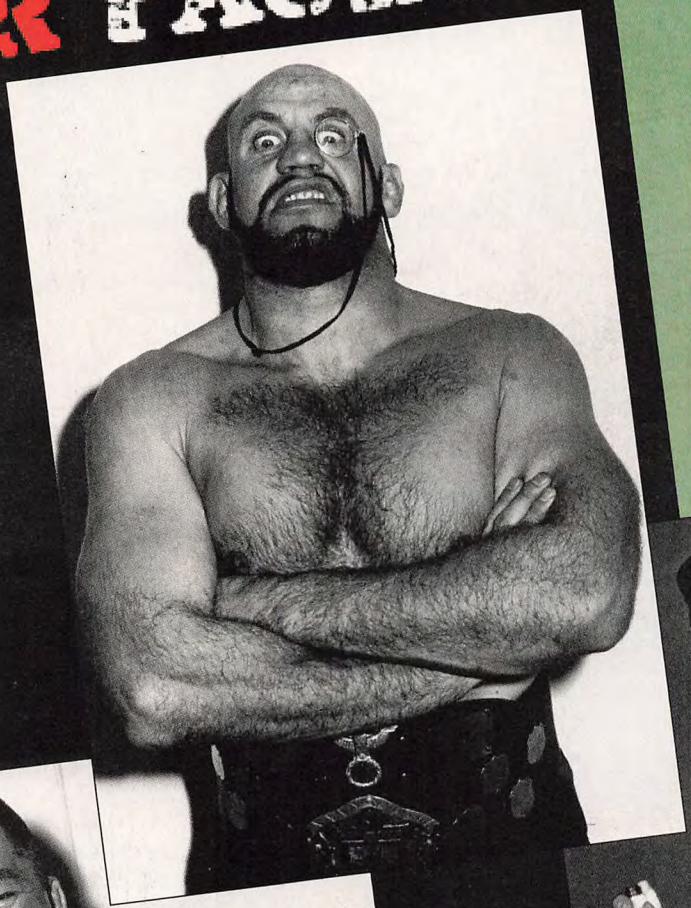

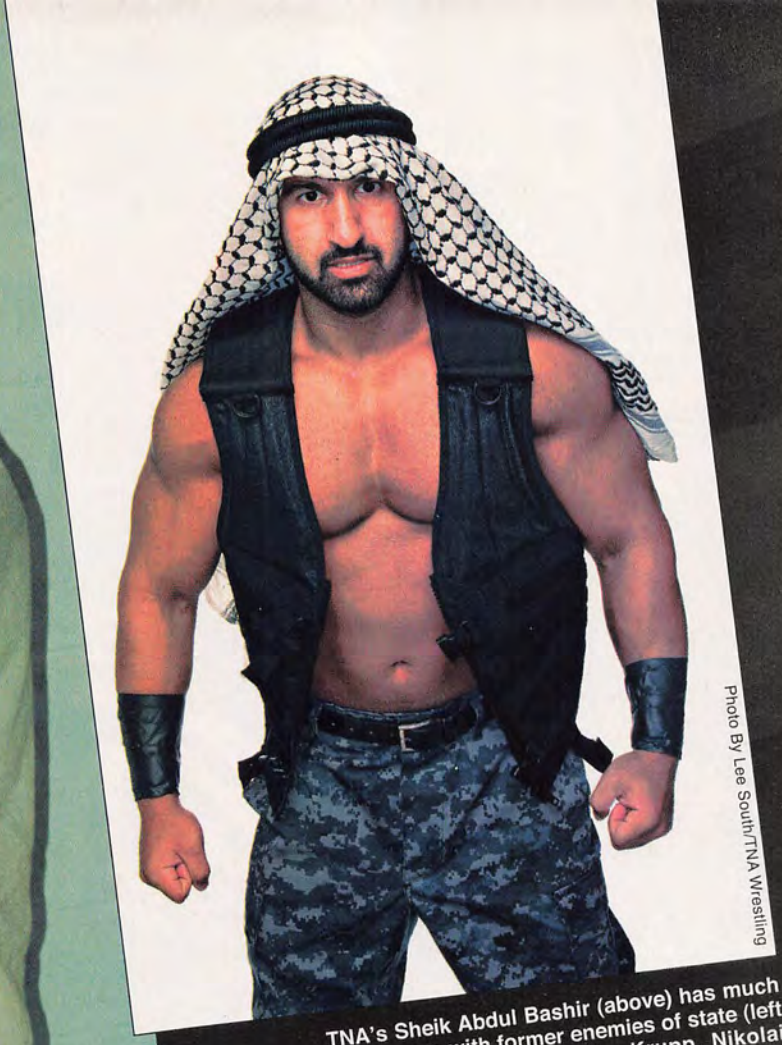

Photo By Lee South/TNA Wrestling

TNA's Sheik Abdul Bashir (above) has much in common with former enemies of state (left to right) Tokyo Tom, Killer Krupp, Nikolai Volkoff, and The Iron Skeik.

BY **MICHAEL MOORE**

IN TODAY'S HYPER-SENSITIVE world of political correctness, virtually no industry tolerates racial or ethnic stereotypes, much less do they perpetuate and exploit them.

But professional wrestling does. It has for decades.

There's no secret why. Promoters know that attacking fans' patriotism and fear of the unknown is big business. Few things elicit as emotional a reaction from us Americans as a physical, verbal, or symbolic threat to our homeland. Thus pro wrestling has always had plenty of Japanese, Russian, Nazi, and Middle Easterners over the years and always will.

Promoters aren't stupid. The have gone and continue to go to the same well so often because they know we'll respond the same way we always have—by chanting, "U.S.A.! U.S.A.! U.S.A.!"

"The easiest way to generate cheap heat in wrestling has always been to play a bad guy from another country," said veteran *PWI* correspondent Matt Brock. "A lot of times guys will go out there and get no response from the crowd. All they have to do is adopt a phony accent and insult the U.S., and the fans will bite every time."

Photo By George Napolitano

Don't like the antics of ECW's latest faction, the Anti-Americans? Don't respond to their anti-American propaganda and it will most likely go away.

Since joining the World Elite, Eric Young has had his hand raised in victory a lot more often. After months of hearing pro-U.S.A. chants, the Canadian native has soured on American fans.

But today is radically different. American wrestling fans know more about other world cultures, and should understand that Russians and others aren't the evil cartoon characters that they were portrayed to be two or three decades ago.

But whether we understand or

not doesn't matter. The vast majority of us simply cannot resist the urge to boo, insult, goad, or embarrass anybody that takes shots at our country and way of life. Like the timeless concepts of right vs. wrong and good vs. evil, patriotism cuts so close to the bone that

Photo By Lee South/TNA Wrestling

THE WORST ANTI-AMERICAN OF ALL

Wrestling history is filled with nefarious characters that have insulted American wrestling fans, but none was worse than Sgt. Slaughter.

During the 1980s, Slaughter wrapped himself in the American flag. He handed out tiny flags to children at AWA shows. Heck, he even had his own G.I. Joe action figure and cartoon character.

But when he returned to the WWF in 1990, Slaughter abandoned the red, white, and blue for his favorite color: green. Slaughter cashed in by turning his back on the fans—and, more importantly, his country.

As American troops prepared to deploy to Iraq leading up to the Gulf War, Slaughter appeared on WWF television and praised Saddam Hussein. He called Americans weak and spit in the face of our troops. He even brought in his old enemy from the AWA, Adnan Al-Kaissie, to serve as his manager.

Slaughter and the WWF received messages threatening Slaughter's life for embarking on such a deplorable path. The WWF even manipulated those threats to move WrestleMania 7 away from the gargantuan Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum—when many have speculated that the real reason for the move was slow ticket sales.

Tito Santana wrestled Slaughter around the country during the fall of 1990.

"I've never seen anything like it," Santana said. "People weren't booing him because he was the bad guy. They honestly despised the man for what he had done. Every time I went to the ring against him, I feared for his safety—and mine."

The ultimate payoff, of course, was Slaughter losing to mega-patriot Hulk Hogan at WrestleMania 7 in 1991. Slaughter apologized to the fans and begged his countrymen to take him back. Some have forgiven Slaughter for his heinous actions, but none have forgotten.

—Michael Moore

Changed his look and his allegiance

Photo By George Napolitano

Mohammed Hassan never passed up an opportunity to irritate American fans, and the fans responded in kind. In the end, though, Hassan's character was deemed a bit too controversial in a post-911 WWE and phased out.

we literally lose our self-control when it's challenged.

That is why foreign factions to this day continue to spring forth and prosper in our great sport. In ECW, it's the anti-American group of Englishman William Regal, Russian Vladimir Kozlov, and American Ezekiel Jackson. Regal takes credit for rallying Jackson and Kozlov to his cause, and really, why wouldn't they stand by his side?

Kozlov hasn't been in a meaningful match since challenging for the WWE title on *Smackdown* last year, and Jackson hasn't done much more than stand at ringside as a bodyguard for Brian Kendrick. By hooking up with Regal and tormenting the fans, Kozlov and Jackson are getting much more attention than ever before—not to mention a considerably louder reaction from fans than they ever have.

In TNA, the World Elite, a large group of wrestlers from Canada, Japan, the Middle East, and England, began antagonizing fans over the summer. Eric Young, Kiyoshi, and The British Invasion embraced Sheik Abdul Bashir's anti-American rhetoric, and it has served them well.

Young, long mired in the Super Eric comedy act, suddenly is rubbing elbows with the Main Event Mafia and being featured more prominently on TNA programming. Kiyoshi and Bashir, who lost for months in the X division shuffle, now are getting more TV

time than other X division wrestlers such as Jay Lethal and Consequences Creed. And Brutus Magnus and Doug Williams of The British Invasion are constantly involved in the TNA and IWGP tag team title scenes.

Who's to blame for the anti-American trend in pro wrestling? We are! Why? Because we take the bait, every time, even when we're not supposed to.

For example: The World Elite's British Invasion—Doug Williams, Brutus Magnus, and Rob Terry—have tangled with Beer Money Inc. several times. Fans have rooted for Robert Roode and James Storm by chanting, "U.S.A.! U.S.A.!"—despite the fact that Roode is from Canada.

"Typical American wrestling fans," said Young, who turned on the fans to join the World Elite. "For months, I was going all over the country wrestling Brutus, and it was always the same thing from the fans: 'U.S.A.! U.S.A.!' Those idiots know I'm from Canada. How was that supposed to motivate me?"

So what can wrestling fans that are fed up with all the anti-American rhetoric in pro wrestling actually do about these types of antagonistic acts? How about ... nothing?

Displaying indifference when wrestlers like Regal and Young spout off will force them to get by on their considerable talent, not cheap verbal tactics. Up-and-comers like Magnus and Kozlov have shown promise, but still have a lot to prove in the ring. And Bashir, one of the most talented X division wrestlers in TNA, could become a much bigger star if he'd use his wrestling acumen and gift of gab to do something other than bash America.

But the responsibility lies with us, the wrestling fans. Do we have the discipline to ignore their attempts to get our goat? Can we sit on our hands in silence long enough to force them—and the companies they work for—to do something different, instead of relying on wrestling stereotypes?

They don't think so.

"The American wrestling fans will keep showing up to boo me, to see if somebody can shut me up," Bashir said with a grin. "And every time they buy a ticket to do that, they're putting more money in my pocket. I've got them right where I want them."

It's up to us to prove him wrong. □

Ivan Koloff was one of pro wrestling's first Soviet-styled menaces and probably reached his most hated status after defeating the beloved Bruno Sammartino for the WWWF championship.

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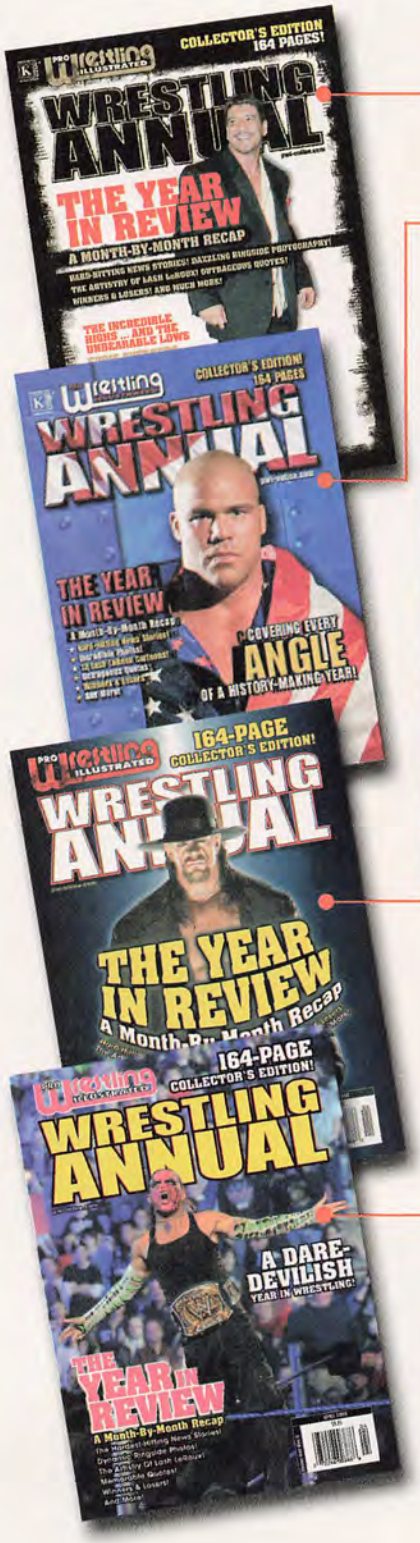

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Vote For The Year's Best Wrestlers & Matches!

Time to go interactive! This is your chance to change the course of history for this industry, so get your ballots ready. It's once again time for you to vote in 11 categories for the PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED 2009 Achievement Awards!

THIS ISN'T THE Oscars … or the Emmys … or even the Tonys. Those award deals are nice if you're into that kind of thing. Hours and hours of self-important stars arriving in limousines and gaudy outfits and prancing down red carpets followed by additional hours and hours of hype and musical numbers and recaps and skits before you get down to what you're really there to see: who wins and who loses. Even then, you have to sit through self-serving acceptance speeches and listen to people thank "The Academy" and all. It's all up to the Academy to decide for you, you know.

This is something much more important to all of us: These are the *PWI* Achievement Awards. Better put, these are, as they have always been, *your PWI* Achievement Awards. We may not be working with a huge Hollywood budget or anything. Heck, we don't even hold an awards ceremony. As many of you know, we just ask *you*—the most loyal and passionate fans in the world—to decide everything. Then, in just a few months, we'll present the results. Consider yourselves our very own loosely defined "academy," if you will. If you want to be part of the process to decide the Rookie of the Year, Wrestler of the Year, Feud of the Year, Match of the Year, among other categories for 2009, go right ahead and join in. Your vote counts as much as anyone else's.

Our "Year In Review" issue is one of the most popular issues of *PWI* among readers every year. It's also one of our favorites to put together. It gives us a chance to put another year of wrestling into perspective. In this section, you do that for us.

Obviously, the most prestigious award is Wrestler of the Year, and the overwhelming favorite to take it home this year is … well, what do you think?

We could name the wrestler we consider the overwhelming favorite in each category, but it really isn't up to us, so we won't waste your time or try to influence your vote.

Okay, a quick introduction/refresher on how this process works: In this special section, descriptions of the various categories are included, along with lists of some of 2009's top candidates (each with a skinny). Take all the time you need to read the descriptions and carefully consider your choices for the various awards. Feel free, of course, to select candidates that we haven't suggested, especially for Match of the Year (the finest of 2009 in that area could have come along just after we went to press, after all). Then cast your votes on the ballot provided on page 101 and send it in.

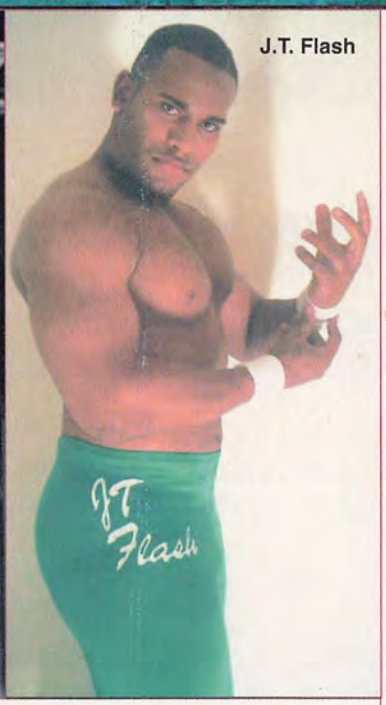
As always, we don't want you to forget to include your special Unofficial Official Awards. This category demands a lot of creativity. You get to make up your own awards and name the recipients. Don't be afraid to be outlandish, ridiculous, or even stupid—the more creative the better. Just keep 'em clean if you want them considered for publication. Some of the better awards from 2008 included the following: Bet You Can't Have Just One: The Bella Twins; Idi Amin Called, He Wants His Accent Back: Booker T; Most Likely To Attack A Bunch of Orphans: Mike Knox; Roses Are Red. Violets Are Blue. To You We Dedicate One Final Whoooooo!: Ric Flair; She Gives Freddy Krueger Nightmares: MsChif; Toothless Aggression: Chris Jericho.

Also remember to include as many wacky Top-10 lists as you care to construct. The stranger the better there as well!

Results of the Achievement 2009 fan poll will be printed in the sensational year-end issue of *PWI*, cover-dated March 2010. That magazine hits newsstands on or about January 19, 2010. For your votes to count, we must receive your ballot by mail or e-mail no later than December 1, 2009, but the sooner we receive it, the better.

This is the most respected and prestigious fan poll in all of professional wrestling, and fans and professionals alike always scrutinize the results. Make your voice heard!

Trent Beretta



J.T. Flash

Photo by Rob Beukema

Jessie Neal

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

ROOKIE OF THE YEAR

A Rookie of the Year nomination is a vote for tomorrow's Wrestler of the Year. A nominee for this category must fulfill two qualifications: He or she must not have been a runner-up in last year's vote, and he or she should have yet to complete his or her second year as a pro by December 31, 2009. Remember that a Rookie of the Year is a superstar in training.

THE CANDIDATE	THE SKINNY
Wes Brisco	Son of Gerald is no stooge in training
Mike Sydal	Brother of Evan Bourne is also an aerialist
Jesse Neal	TNA expects big things out of him
Trent Beretta	Young FCW star compared to Helms, Corino
J.T. Flash	Young, hungry former Marine/football player
Mike Taven	High-flying indy standout looking to make an impact
Brooke Carter	Beauty, brains, and can wrestle, too

ACHIEVEMENT 2009

MOST POPULAR WRESTLER OF THE YEAR

Popularity used to be self-explanatory: cheers, adoration, and the love of the fans. But in recent years, some of the biggest heels have been among the sport's most popular stars. This is a special award in that the winner is a success in the hearts of the fans, regardless of his or her success in the ring. The wrestler (or team) who receives the loudest cheers is the best choice for this category.

THE CANDIDATE	THE SKINNY
Jeff Hardy	Could he do any more to make you appreciate him?
Triple-H	Serious and goofball sides both have appeal
Kofi Kingston	High-energy Jamaican always excites crowds
Shawn Michaels	Think people were kinda glad to see him return?
Undertaker	Ridiculously popular even when he's not around
Christian	Probably expected him to turn heel by now, didn't you?
A.J. Styles	Uneven year in TNA, but he's just so skilled
Evan Bourne	Unorthodox daredevil style helps him stand out in WWE
El Generico	Strange name, big ROH wins over Danielson, Black
John Cena	Sure, the boos are still there, just not as loud
MVP	Sure would look good in Raw's main-event picture
Team 3-D	People never tire of chanting for tables
ODB	For some reason fans really relate to her lifestyle
Mickie James	Has that everywoman kind of appeal
Sting	Cheered a lot even when he tried to be a heel
Rey Mysterio Jr.	Appeals to both young and Latino demographics

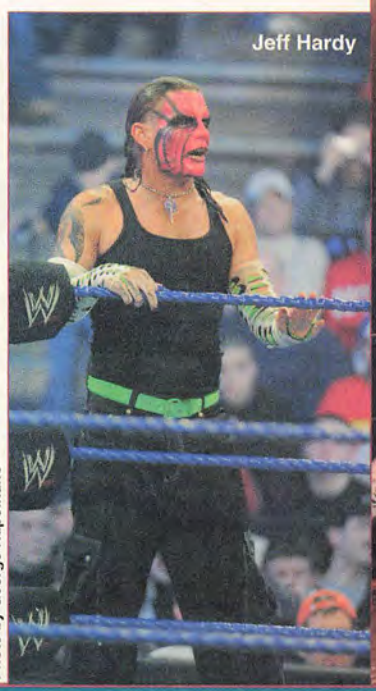

Jeff Hardy

Photo by George Napolitano

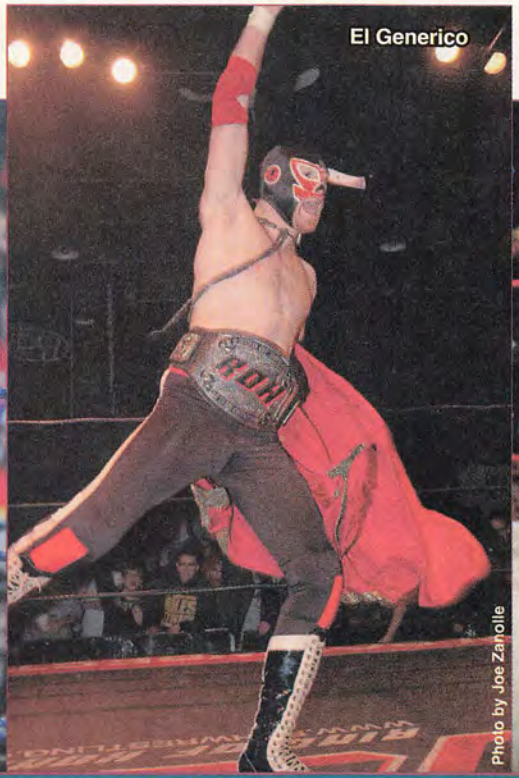

El Generico

Photo by Joe Zaholle

A.J. Styles

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Photo by Duane Long

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

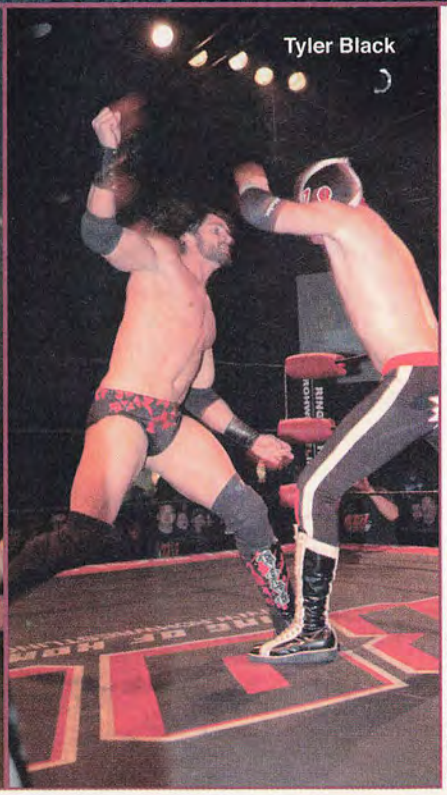


Photo By Joe Zanolle

MOST IMPROVED WRESTLER OF THE YEAR

For Most Improved Wrestler of the Year, choose someone who, throughout 2009, has worked the hardest to improve himself or herself as a wrestler … the man or woman who has struggled to learn several new maneuvers or who has captured a major title for the first time. This wrestler can be a heel or a fan favorite, but the improvement should have been considerable and notable.

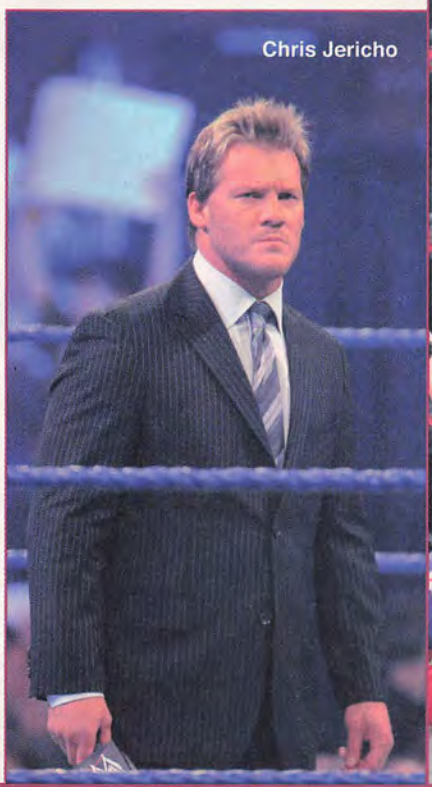
THE CANDIDATE	THE SKINNY
Dolph Ziggler	Former Spirit Squadder forced his way into I-C title picture
John Morrison	Fastest-rising young WWE star
Ted DiBiase Jr.	Might not need Rhodes or Orton much longer
The Miz	Him vs. Morrison could be a main event someday
Hornswoggle	Chavo Jr. knows how much he has improved
Tyler Black	Phenomenal year in ROH nearly netted him singles gold
Homicide	Still hasn't matched his ROH success in TNA
Sheamus	Transition from FCW to ECW was smooth if quiet
Eric Young	From dopey "Super Eric" to Frontliner to dangerous TNA heel
Tyson Kidd	Former T.J. Wilson looks terrific in Hart Dynasty
Maryse	Knee injury ended impressive Divas title reign

ACHIEVEMENT 2009

MOST HATED WRESTLER OF THE YEAR

The flip side of popularity: jeers and utter contempt from the public. Some wrestlers openly court the fans' hatred; others just don't care what they think. Who hears the loudest boos? That really is the only consideration in choosing your Most Hated Wrestler of the Year.

THE CANDIDATE	THE SKINNY
Chris Jericho	He loves it so that you hate him so
C.M. Punk	Still thinks he's a good role model
Kurt Angle	The most reviled of TNA's loathed Main Event Mafia
Edge	Can you believe he even had the gall to dis Vickie?
Kane	Trying to again channel the monster within
Jack Swagger	Has that arrogant jock routine down so well
Randy Orton	Attacks on McMahons made him more hated than ever
Samoa Joe	Year of great frustration led to heel turn
Dolph Ziggler	Probably first of many years on this list
Konnan	Stole the *ashes* of late AAA head Antonio Pena
The Miz	Annoying? No doubt. Awesome? Not just yet



Chris Jericho

Photo by George Napolitano

Kurt Angle vs. A.J. Styles

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

C.M. Punk

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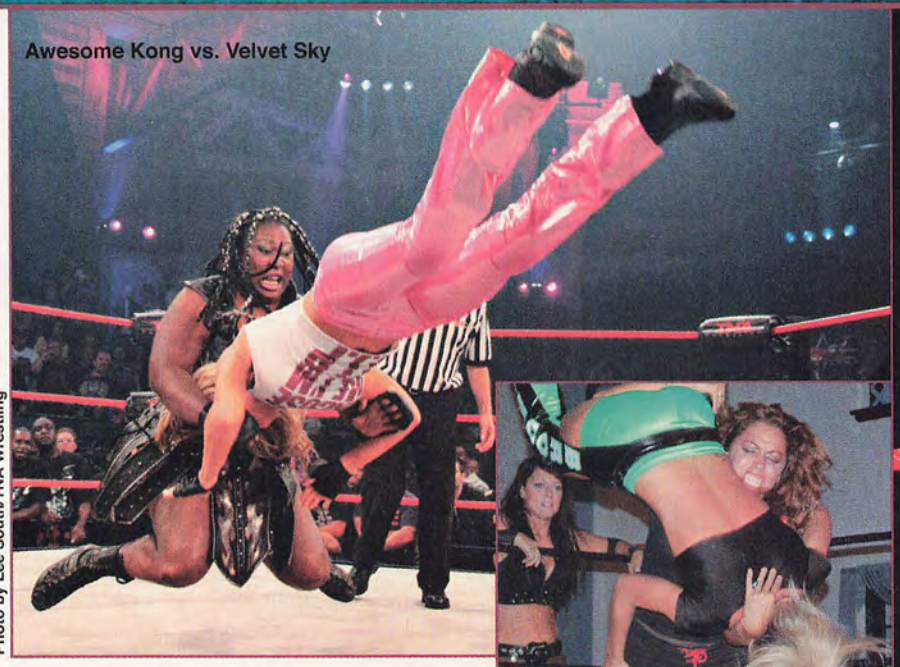

Awesome Kong vs. Velvet Sky

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Angel Orsini vs. Brooke Carter

Photo by Frank Krewda

Melina

Photo by Duane Long

WOMAN OF THE YEAR

Women continue to play more prominent roles in wrestling than ever before. They're beautiful, they're tough, and in many cases, they are very, very influential. You can vote for a woman who wrestles regularly or one who works as a valet/manager/personal assistant. We just ask that you vote for the woman you think made the biggest impact.

THE CANDIDATE	THE SKINNY
Angel Orsini	Sure showed us she belonged in the "Female 50"
Tara	Underappreciated Diva, dazzling Knockout
Awesome Kong	Not quite as dominant in '09, but not bad
Beth Phoenix	In danger of becoming forgotten Diva in 2010?
Michelle McCool	Steady if unspectacular Diva
Mickie James	Anchor of WWE women's division, belt or not
Melina	Adjusted well to the move to Smackdown
Maryse	Have to appreciate her charismatic arrogance
Gail Kim	Fantastic in TNA, a bit lost at times in WWE
ODB	Obvious toughness, underrated skill in this Knockout
MsChif	Dominant woman in NWA, SHIMMER
Dawn Marie	Doing so much good with Wrestlers Rescue

ACHIEVEMENT 2009

COMEBACK OF THE YEAR

Here's an opportunity to honor a competitor who had a big year after suffering through a long losing streak, being in a long period of stagnation, or being out of the sport entirely. The man or woman selected for this award must be presently active on a full-time basis.

THE CANDIDATE	THE SKINNY
Jerry Lynn	Who thought he would unseat McGuinness in ROH?
Tommy Dreamer	Would have guessed he'd retire without winning ECW gold again
Jeff Jarrett	Personal tragedy led to this comeback
Mick Foley	Could have sworn he retired in 2000
Kevin Nash	Man with his knees shouldn't still be winning titles
Christian	Hasn't minded taking the slow road back to top of WWE
Tara	Former Victoria technically never said she was retiring in WWE
Rick Steamboat	Hope you've been seeing him excel on house shows
Christopher Daniels	With Curry Man gone, he's back, sans first name
Rey Mysterio Jr.	Will need another after Wellness Policy violation
The Undertaker	Punk wishes he wasn't a candidate here
Melina	Injury didn't slow her too much
Daffney	Thank Sarah Palin (sorta) for kickstarting her TNA comeback
Shawn Michaels	Can you believe he was working as a short-order cook?

Jerry Lynn

Photo by Joe Zanolle

Tommy Dreamer

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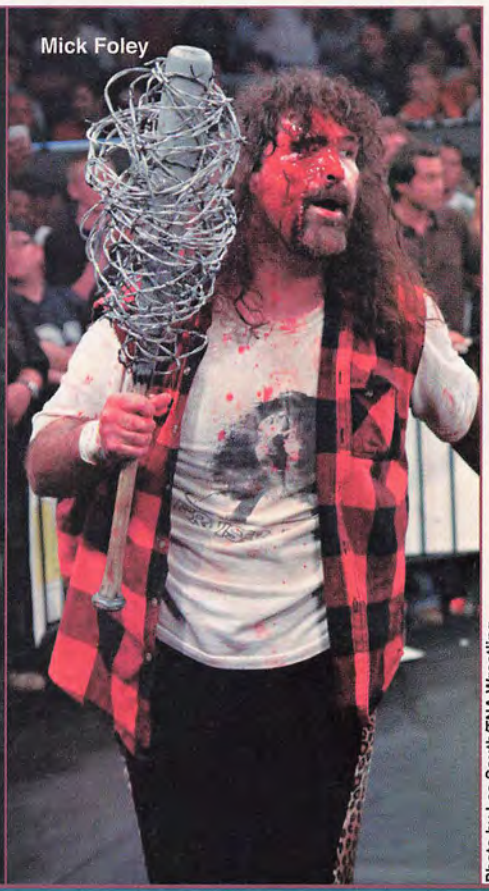
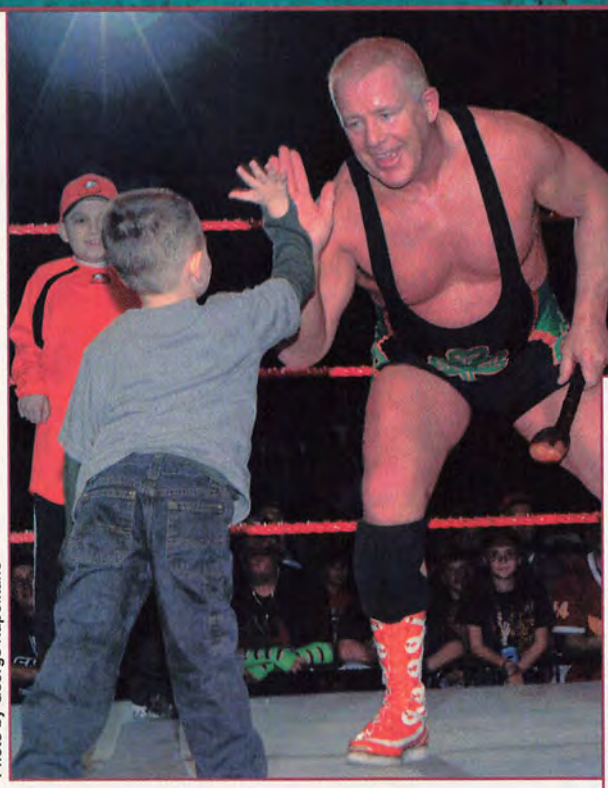
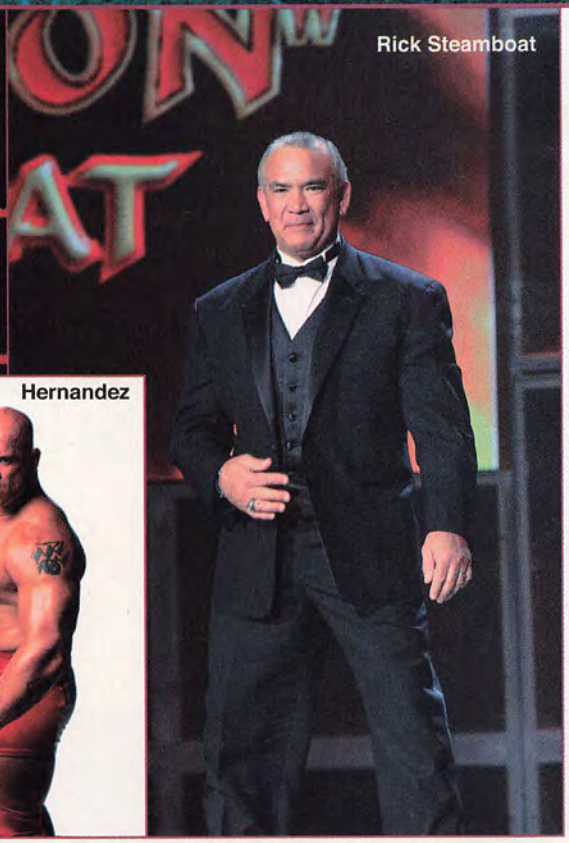

Mick Foley

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling



Finlay

Photo by George Napolitano



Rick Steamboat

Hernandez

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

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INSPIRATIONAL WRESTLER OF THE YEAR

Wrestling is an open arena in which an athlete's personal and physical strengths and weaknesses are on display for all to see. Sometimes a wrestler comes up against a seemingly insurmountable obstacle in his or her career. How he or she deals with that roadblock—and whether he or she can turn a failure into success—can offer inspiration to fans everywhere.

THE CANDIDATE	THE SKINNY
Tommy Dreamer	A decade later, another (unlikely) ECW title
Jeff Hardy	Amazing and scary what he'll do to entertain and excel
Jerry Lynn	Nice ROH title reign for this supposed old man
Finlay	Does the rugged Irishman ever age?
Rick Steamboat	Looked like he never left … 15 years ago!
John Cena	Is it possible that he is still underrated by some?
Evan Bourne	Breathtaking aerial exploits inspire us all
Sting	Half a century old and still looks damn good
Bryan Danielson	Nice to see him earn another shot in WWE
Triple-H	Honorable of him to fight for McMahon family honor
The Miz	Sure, he's annoying, but did you ever think he'd be so good?
Hernandez	Former tag specialist nearly beat Sting for TNA gold

ACHIEVEMENT 2009

FEUD OF THE YEAR

Every year there are wars that capture the imagination of fans for months on end. The criterion is simple: Your choice for Feud of the Year should be that one continuing series of battles (verbal and/or physical)—lasting at least two months—that you feel has dominated the careers of the participants to the exclusion of all other activities. Special note: The wrestlers you select for Feud of the Year need not have wrestled each other numerous times.

THE CANDIDATE	THE SKINNY
Triple-H vs. Randy Orton	Never mess with a man's in-laws
Kurt Angle vs. Jeff Jarrett	This one could get *way* too personal
C.M. Punk vs. Jeff Hardy	"Straight Edge" vs. anything but
Rey Mysterio Jr. vs. Chris Jericho	Even better than first installment in WCW
Christian vs. Jack Swagger	Worth staying up for on Tuesday nights
Main Event Mafia vs. Frontline	More or less defined TNA in 2009
Matt Morgan vs. Abyss	Big man vs. madman thriller
Brent Albright vs. Claudio Castagnoli	Certainly among ROH's best battles
Mickie James vs. Maryse	Girl-next-door vs. snob over Divas gold
Tara vs. Angelina Love	Welcome to TNA, Victoria
El Generico & Kevin Steen vs. American Wolves	Nice to see a good old-fashioned tag feud
Randy Orton vs. Batista	Pretty intense until Batista got hurt … *again*
Chavo Guerrero Jr. vs. Hornswoggle	Please don't vote for this!
Mick Foley vs. Sting	It was early-1990s WCW revisited
John Cena vs. The Miz	Could have and should have been better
Kane vs. The Great Khali	High-speed, high-flying … *uh,* not
Angel Orsini vs. Mercedes Martinez	Indy battle would play well in any promotion

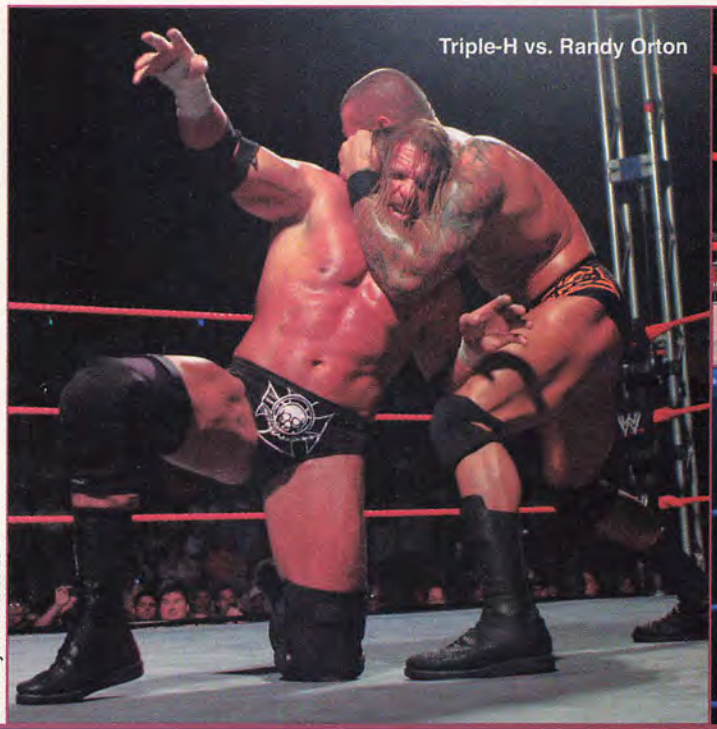
Triple-H vs. Randy Orton

Photo By Matt Roberts

Kurt Angle vs. Jeff Jarrett

C.M. Punk vs. Jeff Hardy

Photo By Lee South/TNA Wrestling

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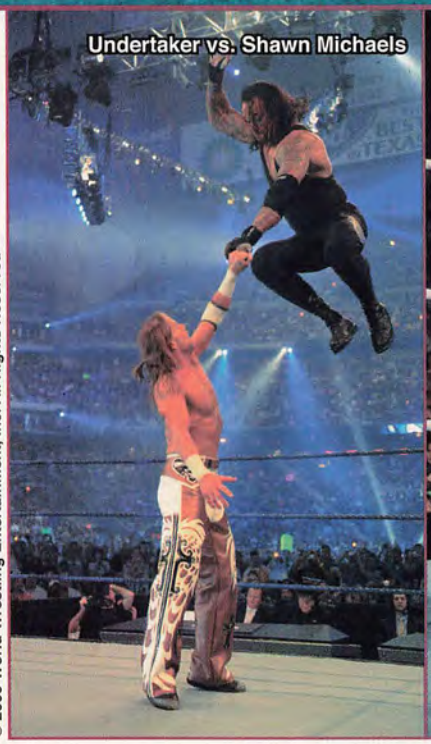
Undertaker vs. Shawn Michaels

Triple-H vs. John Cena vs. Randy Orton

Team 3-D vs. Beer Money inc.

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Photo By Lee South/ TNA Wrestling

MATCH OF THE YEAR

Every wrestling fan, at one time or another, thinks, "That was one of the greatest matches I've ever seen." If that happened to you this year, you know what this category is all about. The bout chosen as Match of the Year might well have historical significance (such as a major title change or a loser-must-retire match), though that is not a specific requirement. (Editor's note: Please remember to give fair consideration to matches that occur after the press date of this issue.)

THE CANDIDATE	THE SKINNY
January 11: Chris Sabin vs. Alex Shelley	Deserved "This is awesome!" chant for X title clash
January 11: Kurt Angle vs. Jeff Jarrett	Turns out Jarrett *does* still have it
January 25: Jeff Hardy vs. Edge	You didn't forget about this one, did you?
January 25: Royal Rumble	Pretty much unforgettable every year
February 23: Jack Swagger vs. Christian	That's right, a can't-miss match from today's ECW
April 4: KENTA & Tyler Black vs. Katsuhiko Nakajima & Austin Aries	Japanese contingent shined at ROH Take No Prisoners
April 5: Shawn Michaels vs. The Undertaker	Somehow exceeded the hype
April 10: American Wolves vs. Kevin Steen & El Generico	Finest of another fine year in ROH
April 19: Team 3-D vs. Beer Money Inc.	Returned to Dudleyville (Philly), recaptured TNA gold
April 26: John Cena vs. Edge	"Rated R Superstar" was last man standing
June 28: Chris Jericho vs. Rey Mysterio Jr.	Rey won I-C gold, kept mask
July 26: John Cena vs. Randy Orton vs. Triple-H	Three-way no-DQ classic at Night of Champions
August 23: C.M. Punk vs. Jeff Hardy	TLC bout at SummerSlam was a carnage-fest
September 1: Rey Mysterio Jr. vs. John Morrison	Breakout match (and I-C title win) for Morrison
September 13: C.M. Punk vs. The Undertaker	Ghosts of the Montreal Screwjob haunt the "Dead Man"

ACHIEVEMENT 2009

TAG TEAM OF THE YEAR

Experience, skill, and success all count in this category, though whether a team is scientific or mainly brawling should make no difference. A Tag Team of the Year should be more than simply a great pairing; it should dominate the promotion in which it competes—and, truly, the sport itself.

THE CANDIDATE	THE SKINNY
Team 3-D	In the conversation for greatest duo ever
Beer Money Inc.	Best of past two years?
American Wolves	Richards/Edwards have coolest name since … Beer Money
Rasche Brown & Keith Walker	Your dad's accountants … or the NWA tag champs?
Carlito & Primo	Not unified champs—or unified at all—for long
Chris Jericho & The Big Show	Sorry, but Show is no Edge
Ted DiBiase Jr. & Cody Rhodes	Shouldn't Legacy be dominating WWE ranks?
Booker T & Scott Steiner	Among WCW's … *er*, TNA's finest
Taiyo Kea & Minoru Suzuki	Japan's best are longest of long shots
Kevin Steen & El Generico	Former champs still a force in ROH ... *Olé!*
Cryme Tyme	Entertaining but not all that successful
Doug Williams & Brutus Magnus	Hottest British invasion since those Liverpool lads

The Big Show & Chris Jericho

Eddie Edwards & Davey Richards

Photo by Joe Zanolle

Booker T & Scott Steiner

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

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Kurt Angle

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

C.M. Punk

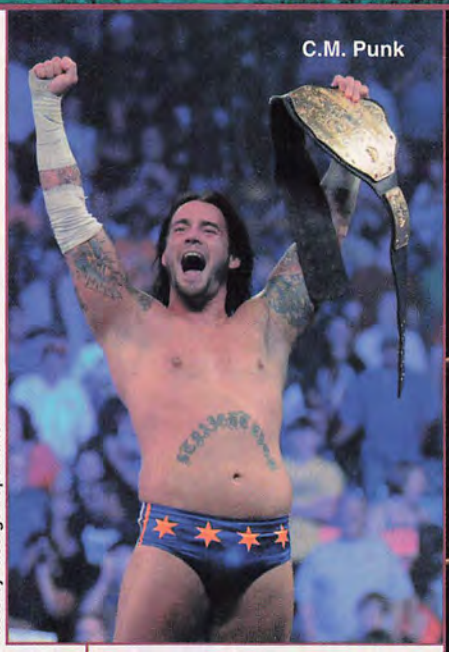


Photo by George Napolitano

Austin Aries

Photo by Joe Zanolle

WRESTLER OF THE YEAR

This is the top honor: The winner of this award should be the one person who has personified the essence of professional wrestling throughout 2009. Talent, skill, and achievement are the three prerequisites for this category. The competitor chosen as Wrestler of the Year should be the most well-rounded athlete in the sport—and the most accomplished of the year.

THE CANDIDATE	THE SKINNY
Randy Orton	Criticize the tactics but not the domination of Raw
Triple-H	Gave us a nice WWE title run and another D-X reunion
Kurt Angle	Too much baggage but consistent excellence in TNA
Chris Jericho	Does he need a world championship to earn this honor?
Austin Aries	Became first two-time champ in ROH history
John Cena	Snagged two more world titles and dogged Orton
Hiroshi Tanahashi	Two IWGP title wins in 2009, including one over Muto
Blue Demon Jr.	If only holding the NWA title meant what it once did
Jeff Hardy	World title reigns were short but very memorable
C.M. Punk	Certainly found his way as a heel in WWE

Official Fan Ballot

Send ballot to: **Achievement 2009 Vote** • c/o Pro Wrestling Illustrated • 6198 Butler Pike/Suite 200 • Blue Bell, PA 19422
E-mail to: **pwiawards@yahoo.com**

Rookie of the Year: _____

Most Popular Wrestler of the Year: _____

Most Improved Wrestler of the Year: _____

Most Hated Wrestler of the Year: _____

Woman of the Year: _____

Comeback of the Year: _____

Inspirational Wrestler of the Year: _____

Feud of the Year: _____

Match of the Year: _____

Tag Team of the Year: _____

Wrestler of the Year: _____

My "Unofficial Official" Awards for 2009: _____

My Predictions for 2010: _____

Additional Comments (please include top 10 lists on separate sheets of paper): _____

NAME _____ **AGE** _____

STREET _____

CITY _____ **STATE** _____ **ZIP** _____ **E-MAIL** _____

HOW DID YOU GET THIS ISSUE? ☐ **SUBSCRIPTION** ☐ **NEWSSTAND**

Feel free to include extra remarks, awards, and more predictions/Top 10s on additional sheets of paper. You may e-mail your award winners, "Unofficial Officials," Top 10s, and predictions to pwiawards@yahoo.com. Ballots are due December 1, 2009.

Achievement 2009

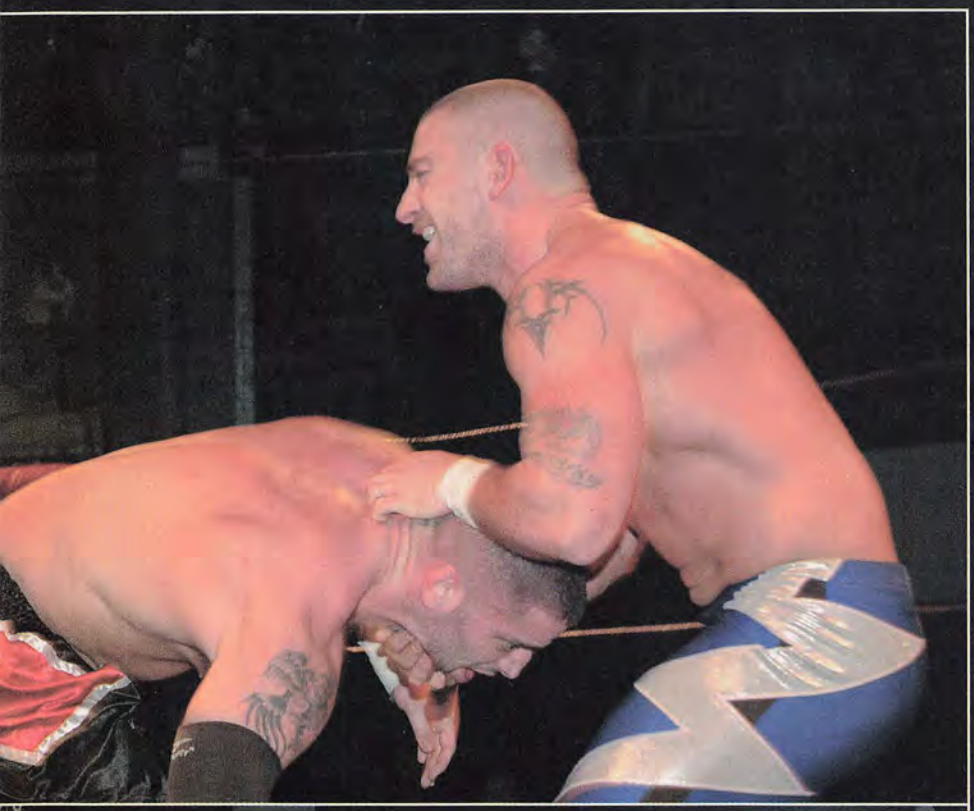
TIME FOR THE BRISCOES TO

MAN UP!

OR THE AMERICAN WOLVES WILL BECOME ROH'S BEST ALL-TIME TAG TEAM

TEXT BY **AL CASTLE**
PHOTOS BY **JOE ZANOLLE**

IT HAD BEEN about a half hour-since the final match had ended at a recent Ring of Honor event in Dayton, Ohio, and as they are known to do, a few fans stayed behind, hoping to meet their favorite stars.



Davey Richards has proven to be every bit as dynamic as Mark Briscoe, whether it comes to slugging it out (top) or wrestling on the mat (above). No wonder some fans see The American Wolves as a newer version of the Briscoes.

Still recovering from their match with the Young Bucks, Mark and Jay Briscoe sat on a couple of folding chairs near ringside when they overheard a fan tell his friend, "We've got to get a picture with them. They're like the best tag team in the history of ROH."

Mark and Jay both managed humble smiles, sat upright, and removed the towels that were draped over their heads as the two fans walked toward them, digital cameras in hand … and then right on by.

Unbeknownst to Mark and Jay, standing near the backstage curtain a few yards behind them were the ROH tag team champions, Davey Richards and Eddie Edwards.

"That wasn't no thing, man," an apparently unfazed Jay Briscoe said when asked about the embarrassing moment minutes later. "Ring of Honor fans have the right to like whoever they want."

But whether they'd ever admit or not, the apparent snub by a couple of fans is a microcosm of a larger phenomenon taking place in ROH. The American Wolves are making a lot of fans forget about The Briscoe Brothers.

"There's no doubt about it. The Briscoes represent ROH's past. We represent its future," said Richards. "And whether fans like us or not, it's tough for them to deny how effective we are. And, the truth is, it's been a while since Mark and Jay could say the same."

First paired by Larry Sweeney when both men were members of the now-disbanded Sweet 'n' Sour Inc., the Wolves made an impact on the ROH tag team scene almost immediately. They also made quite the statement when they attacked Mark Briscoe's knee during a December 2008 event in New York City—putting the younger Briscoe brother on the shelf for months.

With the once-dominant sibling duo temporarily neutralized, Richards and Edwards quickly rose through ROH's tag team ranks and earned title shots against then-champions Kevin Steen and El Generico.

After several unsuccessful attempts to take the belts, the Wolves finally defeated "Steenerico" in an April 10 table match taped for ROH's weekly television show on HDNet.

The Wolves' star has only burned hotter since their title victory, as they have picked up more impressive wins in rematches against Steen and Generico, as well as the team of Roderick Strong and KENTA. The Wolves also went to a 45-minute draw against Bryan Danielson and Tyler Black in a match heralded as an instant classic.

"They're the real thing," Black said of Richards and Edwards. "A lot of times you see two skilled singles get themselves some matching ring gear and a catchy little name and they think they're a tag team. But it takes more than that to create a truly spe-

cial tag team. And the Wolves have figured that out."

While the Wolves are earning a strong reputation for their mix of speed, technique, aerial maneuvers, and smash-mouth aggression, the Briscoes have struggled to gain much traction in a tag team division they once ruled.

A string of injuries, particularly to Mark, have kept the brothers from gaining momentum over the past several months. Their repeated setbacks have also forced fans to consider whether the team known for its slogan—"Man Up"—still has the heart to take its own advice.

"While those two spend most of their time trying to nurse each other back to health from their hospital beds, me and Davey continue to make a name for ourselves by taking on anyone and everyone," said Edwards. "They like to act like they're a couple of tough-as-nails rednecks, but the truth is they're a pair of fragile, broken down has-beens that can't take a few cuts and bruises. And they're hardly competition for The American Wolves."

For months, the champions refused to grant the Briscoes a title shot, claiming that the five-time champions had "not earned it." But the Briscoes—and some fans—believe the Wolves are simply avoiding a showdown, considering that the Briscoes have looked as good as ever since being reunited this summer, especially in matches against The Young Bucks—Matt and Nick Jackson—and The Super Smash Brothers.

"We say we are the greatest tag team in Ring of Honor. They say they are," Mark Briscoe said recently. "The only way to find out for sure is in the ring. But those two haven't had the nerve to face us. They're more like The American Chickens, if you ask me."

As of press time, Edwards and Richards were set to take on the Briscoes in their first ever two-on-two match, on September 19 at Chicago Ridge. But the Wolves refused to put their tag team championship on the line in the grudge match. Non-title matches are just not the same as title matches, and so, the debate over who is the very best tag team in Ring of Honor may not be answered for some time to come.

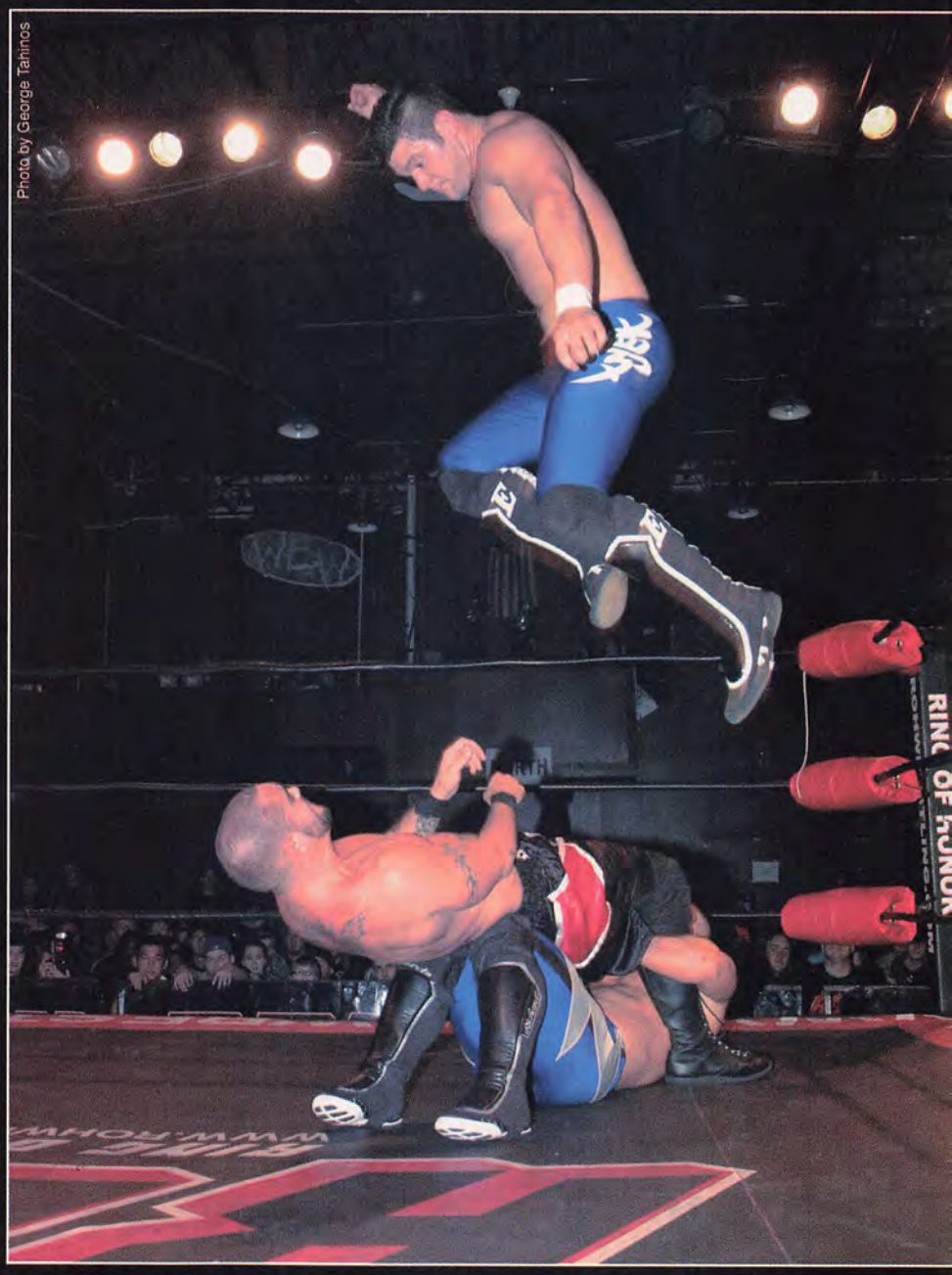


Photo by George Tahinos

Edwards' and Richards' seamless teamwork is reminiscent of the interplay the Briscoes used for years to dominate ROH's tag ranks

And before either team lays claim to that distinction, several other duos on ROH's deep tag team roster may have something to say about the matter. They include Steen and Generico, The Young Bucks, and The Dark City Fight Club—Kory Chavis and Jon Davis.

But more than just bragging rights and tag team championship gold are on the line in the collision course between The American Wolves and The Briscoe Brothers. At stake may be a place in ROH history as the very best team ever to step into an ROH ring together. And if Mark and Jay Briscoe don't find a way to get Richards and Edwards under control, what happened in the aftermath of the Dayton event might become the rule, and not the exception. □

HIS NAME IS DOLPH ZIGGLER & HE'S READY TO DEAL IN GOLD!

BY **LOUIE DEE**

THEY SAY THE third time is the charm. For Dolph Ziggler, that adage has already rung true. He's currently in his third stint as a WWE roster member, under his

Photo by George Napolitano

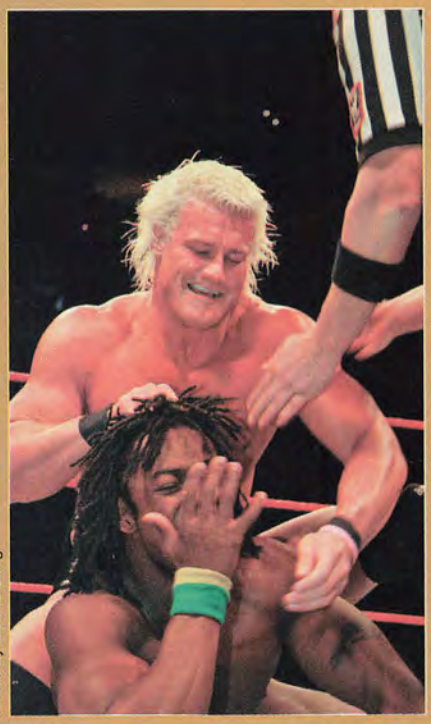


Photo by Duane Long

Cocky as ever, Ziggler takes time out to humiliate Kofi Kingston after breaking a wear-down hold. Even though that attitude infuriates fans and opponents, it gives Ziggler extra drive in the ring.

third different persona. And while he was unsuccessful in his first two attempts to unseat Rey Mysterio Jr. as the Intercontinental champion, Ziggler has shown marked improvement even from his first few "introductory" appearances on *Raw* about a year ago.

At the rate at which he his progressing, Ziggler is on track to make a significant dent in the WWE title scene on Smackdown. He has the talent, he has the charisma, and most importantly, after holding his own against Mysterio, a true wrestling icon, Ziggler has the confidence and experience.

So if the rule of three holds true again, it could only be a matter of time before Ziggler has a new introduction: "My name is Dolph Ziggler and I'm the WWE World champion ... damn glad to meet ya!"

Okay, so maybe he won't be stealing Tim Matheson's line from *Animal House*, but Ziggler is on the precipice of becoming WWE's next breakout star.

Surprised? Don't be. Ziggler boasts the physique of a champion—6', 220 pounds of chiseled muscle. And despite his inability to take the title from Mysterio—John Morrison eventually did that—he's put down some of WWE's biggest stars, literally, as he holds a clean pinfall win over former WWE World champion The Great Khali.

Not bad for a guy whose career was almost a casualty from the fallout of Eddie Guerrero's death.

But a good man survives his past, a strong man perseveres through it, and a wise man learns from it. (Hey, there's that notion of threes again!)

Four years ago, Ziggler made his first appearance on the WWE roster as Nick Nemeth, the "caddy" for newly Americanized Kerwin (Chavo Guerrero) White. But when Eddie Guerrero tragically passed in November 2005, Chavo re-dedicated his career to the legacy of his late uncle. With Kerwin White firmly in the past, Nemeth's time on *Raw* came to an end.

Not a happy moment, but even in limited glimpses, Ziggler's innate charisma shone. As part of The Spirit Squad, the newly re-christened Nicky was able to put a world tag team championship on his resume. But when the Squad disbanded and was sent packing by DX, things looked bleak again. Kenny became the breakout star, Mitch got the boot, and Nicky, Johnny, and Mikey seemed to disappear ... until now.

After toiling in the WWE develop-

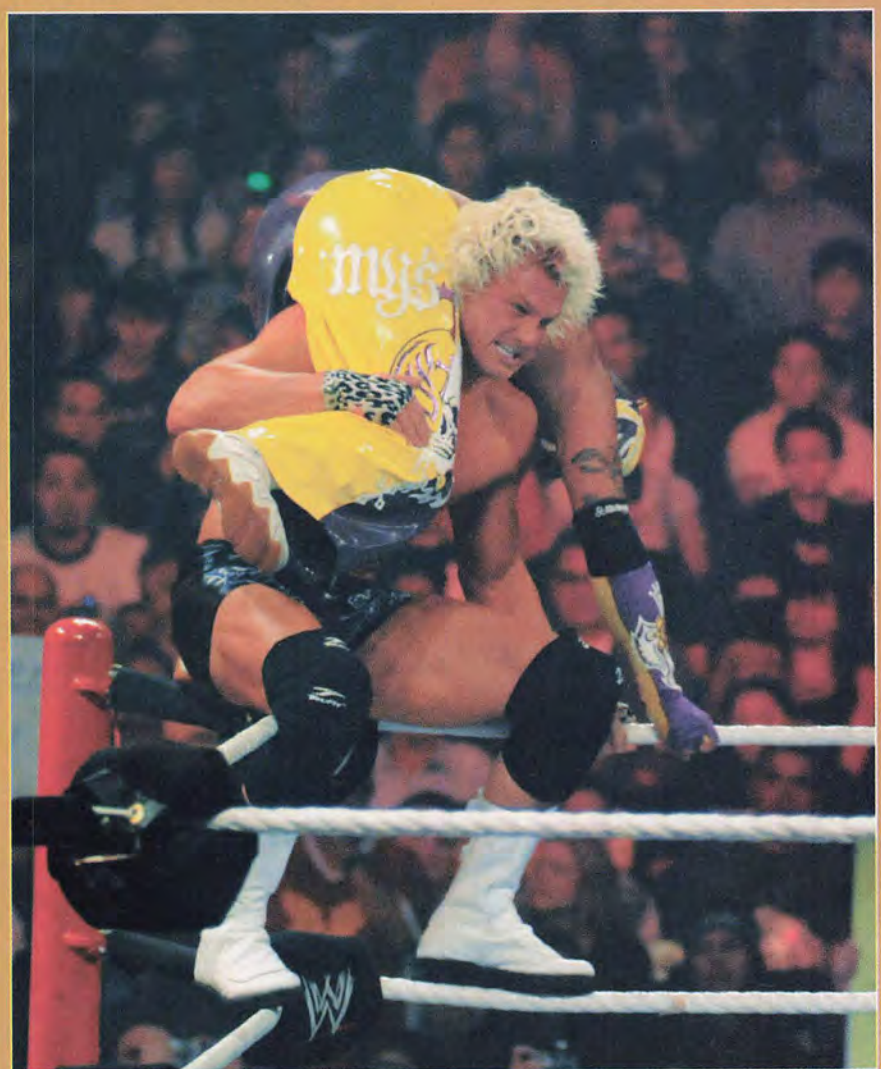
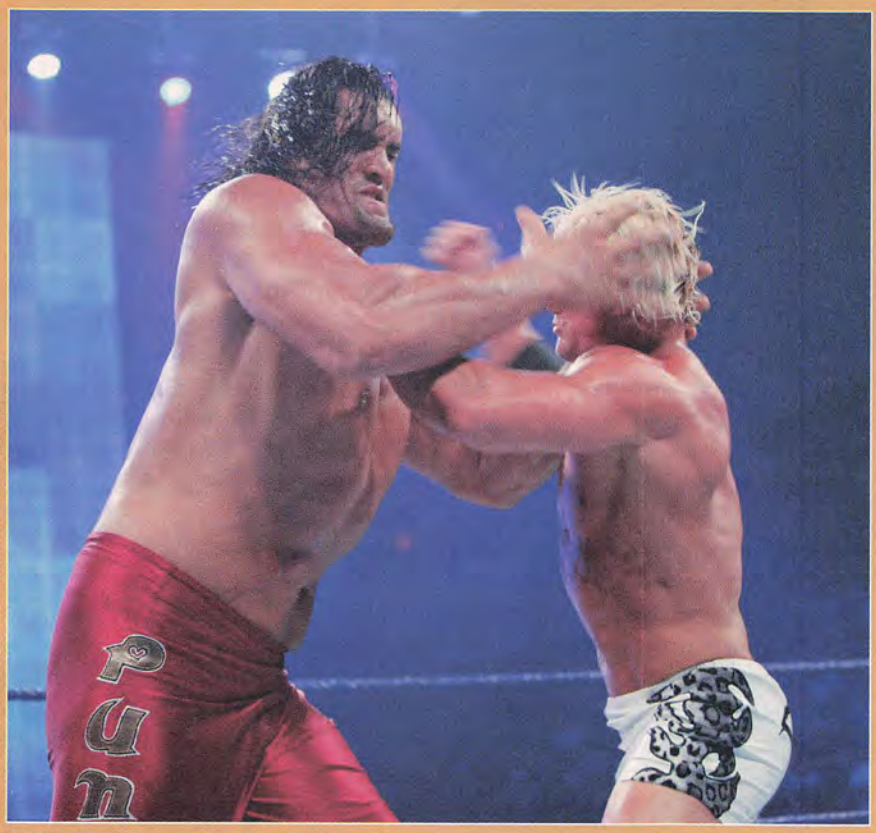


Photo by George Napolitano

Though he was unable to wrestle the Intercontinental title from Rey Mysterio Jr., Ziggler proved to doubters he was a worthy and dangerous challenger.



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Despite facing a severe size disadvantage, Ziggler has enjoyed several victories over The Great Khali, including a clean pinfall win.

mental system for a while, Dolph Ziggler got his groove back.

He showed up on *Raw* about a year ago under his current moniker, introducing himself to everyone he could find backstage. It wasn't that he was trying to be friendly; this was more of a cocky introduction, showing a swagger that was absent even in the most notorious of Spirit Squad moments.

Annoying? Sure. Memorable? Absolutely.

All he needed was one break, and that came in the 2009 WWE Supplemental Draft. Ziggler was sent to Smackdown and immediately set his sights on slaying The Great Khali.

And he did, with smarts that included a DQ win that saw him trick the referee into thinking Khali had struck him with a chair, and with brawn, scoring a clean pinfall victory over the Punjabi giant. Then came The Bash and SummerSlam, where both times he came within a hair's breadth of defeating Mysterio for the I-C title.

Should he put that title in his trophy case, Ziggler will have won two of the three championships Smackdown has to offer. The I-C title has long been a steppingstone to bigger gold, and some of WWE's brightest stars—from Randy Savage to the Ultimate Warrior to Triple-H—held it shortly before capturing one of WWE's two biggest prizes.

"Dolph Ziggler has all the talent in the world," *Smackdown* color commentator Jim Ross told *PWI*. "Sure, his attitude may be a little prickly, but you can't say the kid doesn't believe in himself. And after what he's done against guys like Khali, Mysterio, and Morrison, you can't really blame him."

Morrison, who was the I-C champ as of press time and a likely opponent for the cocky blond, has also noticed Ziggler's recent improvement.

"Yeah, it's all coming together for Ziggler right now," Morrison admitted. "But it's also coming together for me. I guess we're on a collision course ... and it will be a fight I won't take lightly."

It may have taken him a few years, a few identities, and a few setbacks, but Dolph Ziggler is finally making his big move. With Jeff Hardy gone and Mysterio losing his belt, Ziggler knows it's his time to blossom. With that knowledge, on top of his already-impressive acumen, it may be only a matter of time before he becomes Smackdown's newest golden boy.

Of course, Ziggler agrees.

"Nobody on Smackdown, or in all of WWE for that matter, has my combination of ability, looks, charisma, and intangibles. Why, you ask? Because nobody is Dolph Ziggler." □

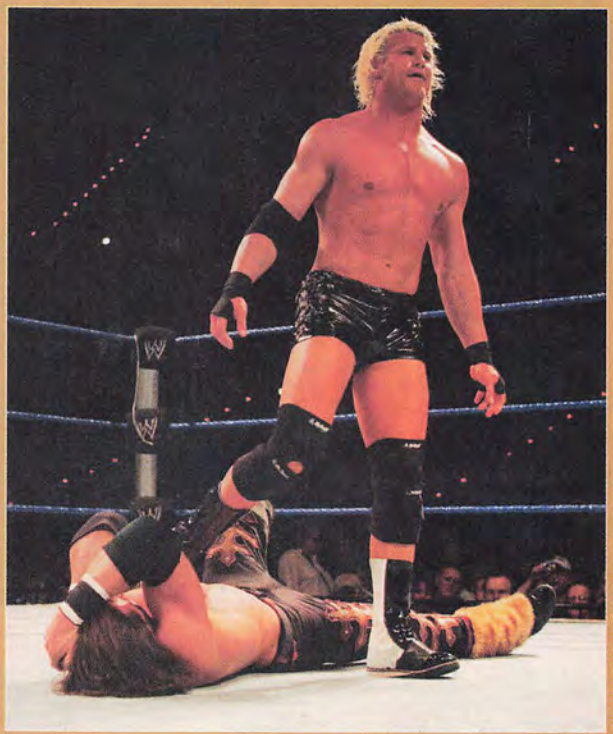

Photo by Matt Roberts

Ziggler and Morrison have both seen their careers improve since arriving on Smackdown. Now that Morrison is I-C champ, they will win no doubt renew hostilities.

the business page

By Harry Burkett

Guest hosts or GMs? The verdict is in: The guest host concept has been a spectacular success, credited with helping *Raw* earn its highest ratings in eight years. Traditionalists probably aren't happy to hear that news, considering the guest host concept takes WWE even further from the premise of wrestling as sport, but there is no denying that celebrity guest hosts lure casual viewers and even WWE legends serving as GHs help recapture old fans. *Raw*'s ratings thrived in the 3.5 to 4.5 range throughout the summer.

Indeed, the Monday Night War had just ended, the WCW/ECW invasion was fizzling, and Steve Austin had just turned heel the last time *Raw* garnered these kinds of numbers.

The statistics recently released by USA Network indicate *Raw* viewership is on the upswing, thanks in part to the guest host concept that was introduced on June 29. The number of total viewers has reached an average of 5.72 million, an 11 percent increase compared to the summer of 2008. Furthermore, WWE's flagship program is watched in 3.83 million households, a 16 percent increase since the same period last year. In the coveted 18- to 49-year-old demographic, *Raw* has increased by four percent, compared to the summer of 2008. That figure rises to eight percent among 25- to 54-year-olds.

Wrestling purists who bemoan the current trend shouldn't fret. Jeremy Piven and Dr. Ken aren't necessarily the future of our great sport. The overall ratings for episodes hosted by Piven and Ken, Shaquille O'Neal, Floyd Mayweather, Freddie Prinze Jr., Seth Green, and ZZ Top have averaged 3.7. The overall ratings for episodes hosted by Batista, Sgt. Slaughter, Dusty Rhodes, and Ted DiBiase Sr. have averaged 3.7.

Absolutely no difference.

However, there is a lesson to be gleaned from the numbers: If a household celebrity name is not available, then it's best to go with a legend. Big names mean grand slams in the ratings. O'Neal and Mayweather helped the program score above 3.9. Donald Trump's appearance on June 22 scored a

WWE's guest host idea has been a huge hit, rocketing *Raw*'s ratings to the level that had been hoped for. There is a notable difference when mainstream stars such as Floyd Mayweather Jr. appear as compared to lesser-known acts.

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4.5, *Raw*'s highest rating since 2002. Bob Barker's recent GH appearance garnered a 3.8.

Ratings for WWE superstars and legends—such as Batista, Slaughter, Rhodes, and DiBiase—were more predictable, all falling in the 3.6 to 3.8 range. Celebrities with less household recognition—such as Prinze, Green, Piven and Dr. Ken, and ZZ Top—failed to get past the 3.5 mark.

TNA pay-per-views under review ... Could Sacrifice, Hard Justice, or No Surrender become things of the past? TNA President Dixie Carter raised that possibility during the August 30 edition of *Live Audio-Wrestling*. She admitted to not being a fan of having pay-per-views on a monthly basis.

"You have contracts that keep you held in and bound at times," said Carter, referring to wrestlers' salaries being tied to a certain number of PPV payoffs each year. "We're definitely talking about trying to shake things ups and do things differently in the future."

TNA is already promoting certain pay-per-views as can't-miss events, including Lockdown, Slammiversary, and Bound for Glory—similar to WWE's promotion of the Royal Rumble, WrestleMania, SummerSlam, and Survivor Series as the Big Four. Sources indicate Carter would prefer to hold only six PPVs per year, although it's uncertain how soon she could implement the plan.

Obviously, TNA's television deal with Spike TV is providing the company with reliable income, compared to the spotty profits gained on PPV. Carter said she is actively seeking to provide more TNA programming for Spike and other television outlets.

DISH Network opens the Dream Gate ... Who says Dragon Gate USA isn't competing directly against Ring of Honor? As if hiring former ROH booker Gabe Sapolsky weren't enough, Dragon Gate joined ROH in the video-on-demand market with its premiere offering on September 4. The VOD event was carried by iN DEMAND, DISH Network, and TVN in the U.S. and by Bell Express VU and Viewer's Choice in Canada.

Taped at The Arena in Philadelphia, Naruki Doi beat Open the Dream Gate champion Shingo in a non-title bout; Nick and Matt Jackson defeated CIMA and Susumu Yokosuka; The Dragon Kid beat Masato Yoshino; Mike Quackenbush, Jigsaw, and The Colony defeated Gran Akuma, Icarus, Amasis, and Hallowicked; and Yamato pinned BxB Hulk. □

Dragon Gate has taken another step to becoming a top indy in the US with its video on demand deal. Now viewers all across the country can see top-notch action taped from The Arena in South Philadelphia.

Photo Courtesy of Dragon Gate USA

WWE Stockwatch

(For the period of August 1 to 31, 2009)

30-Day High: 15.25 on August 10
30-Day Low: 13.16 on August 6
52-Week High: 16.69 on September 8, 2008
52-Week Low: 8.76 on November 21, 2008

Fortunately for WWE, its shares took only a short tumble when noted brokerage firm Hilliard Lyons downgraded the company's stock from "long-term buy" to "neutral" on August 17. WWE's stock price opened at 14.26 and had dropped to 13.95 by day's end. It reached a low of 13.84 on August 19 before rebounding on August 20. While "neutral" may seem like a benign term, it really is not in the investing world. Being downgraded to neutral can have a disastrous effect on stock value, so it's a testament to WWE's strong reputation in the marketplace that it did not drop even further.

In fact, that incident appears to be only a minor blip in the overall recovery of WWE stock. Its 30-day high of 15.25 on August 10 is on par with levels from the same time last year. That said, WWE stock value remains a far cry from its 1999-2000 heyday when it routinely surpassed 20.00 per share.

More from the incestuous world of WWE and its toy licensees: Edward Kaufman, former WWE executive vice president and general counsel, has joined THQ Inc. as its executive vice president of business and legal affairs. THQ has been a frequent business partner of WWE and Jakks Pacific in recent years. Like WWE, THQ has been engaged in ongoing legal battles with Jakks.

TV breakdown

RAW (USA)

August 3: 3.6
August 10: 3.8
August 17: 3.8
August 24: 3.9
August 31: 3.6
September 7: 3.8

Analysis: As analyzed in our lead item, *Raw* enjoyed a remarkable 10-week stretch throughout the summer. So what does autumn have in store? Unfortunately for WWE, kids heading back to school and the start of the football season will probably have an adverse effect. Nevertheless, *Raw* maintained a healthy 3.8 overall rating for its September 7 edition with Bob Barker serving as guest host. That was *Raw*'s best rating since the August 24 program when Floyd Mayweather was at the helm. Perhaps an understated aspect of *Raw*'s current success is Randy Orton's WWE title reign, which was the primary focus of every show. With WWE hinting at upcoming fireworks within Legacy, *Raw* should make for more compelling viewing in the weeks ahead. By the way, when is Bob Orton Jr. going to serve as GH?

SMACKDOWN (MyNetworkTV)

July 31: 2.0
August 7: 1.9
August 14: 1.7
August 21: 1.9
August 28: 1.9
September 4: 2.0

Analysis: *Raw*'s success might be having a ripple effect on *Smackdown*, but there were a couple of other factors to consider regarding the July 31 edition, which marked the first time the blue brand had scored a 2.0 since April 17. First, it was the first episode of *Smackdown* following Jeff Hardy's WWE World heavyweight title victory over C.M. Punk at Night of Champions. Second, it featured Hardy successfully defending his newly won belt against fellow fan favorite John Morrison. On the other hand, the August 14 program had tumbled to 1.7 based on a relatively weak main event pitting Hardy against David Hart Smith and Tyson Kidd in a handicap match. *Smackdown* returned to a 2.0 on September 4, a program that featured The Undertaker's return following Jeff Hardy's departure, and Matt Hardy beating new World champion C.M. Punk by disqualification.

ECW (Syfy)

July 28: 1.3
August 4: 1.3
August 11: 1.1
August 18: 1.2
August 25: 1.2
September 1: 1.4
September 8: 1.0

Analysis: How did the September 1 edition score *ECW*'s highest rating since March 17? Was it because of Shelton Benjamin vs. Zack Ryder or Sheamus vs. Goldust? Any of those individuals would love to take the credit, but that very strong 1.4 rating was a direct result of a replay of the WrestleMania 25 match featuring The Undertaker vs. Shawn Michaels. Will this inspire WWE to feature other classic matches, similar to their "From The Vault" feature on *WWE Excess* several years ago? That could potentially boost ratings, expose up-and-comers such as Ryder and Sheamus to larger audiences, and promote WWE Classics on Demand. Without the benefit of such a high-profile match, and perhaps because so many children were going back to school the next day, the September 8 edition plummeted to 1.0.

IMPACT (Spike TV)

July 30: 1.3
August 6: 1.2
August 13: 1.1
August 20: 1.2
August 27: 1.1
September 3: 1.0

Analysis: *Impact* has successfully remained above 1.0 throughout 2009 thus far, yet there has been a slight downward trend since the end of July. Peaking at 1.3 on July 3, *Impact* bottomed out at 1.0 with the September 3 edition. Sting and A.J. Styles advanced in a mini-tournament to earn spots in Kurt Angle's upcoming TNA World title defense at No Surrender. Matt Morgan already occupied the remaining spot in the four-way title match. TNA Creative has been utilizing mini-tournaments for wrestlers to earn certain spots at future pay-per-views, which satisfies Dixie Carter's vision for a more athletically based program. Let's hope this move away from juvenile soap opera to more of a sports feel is not responsible for the slight dip in the numbers. Diehard fans definitely want less WCW and more MMA.

2 MAGAZINES IN 1!

THE WRESTLER/INSIDE WRESTLING

Okay, it was an experiment. We took a gamble. Nobody had ever thought of binding two magazines, back cover to back cover, and selling them as one package. It wouldn t have worked with most magazines, but *The Wrestler* and *Inside Wrestling* have been so closely associated for the last 40 years, we thought it just might work. Well, it did! Reader response has been overwhelmingly positive. So if you missed the combination issues we ve published so far, here s a chance to order them.

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win, lose, or draw

By Harry Burkett

I WAS FASCINATED by the recent debate between Mick Foley and Kevin Nash. Foley claimed he was driven to be a professional wrestler because of his passion for the business. Nash said he was in the business only for the money.

Kevin Nash is a liar.

Sure, Mick Foley—as a three-time WWF World champion, a one-time TNA World champion, and a *New York Times* bestselling author—has become accustomed to providing a comfortable lifestyle for his family and devoting large sums to philanthropy. Yet Foley has been smart enough to invest in his future, not squander his rewards, and is basically set for life. It was his love for his profession that drove him to come out of retirement to win the World title from Sting at Lockdown and recently spill blood in an ill-fated Legends title defense against Nash.

On the other hand, Nash is coming off as a shallow cad because he loves this business. He may rarely admit it, heck, he may never even admit it to himself, but in what other profession could Nash appear on television every week portraying an egotistical smooth operator and call himself "Big Sexy"? At 50 years old, no less? Would his life be nearly as rich if he didn't have Scott Hall, Eric Bischoff, and Oz to talk about?

Would Foley work in this business for free? Yes, and he often does. Would Nash? Probably not ... but he would darn sure miss it.

There have been very few high-profile stars who really didn't like the business. Bill Goldberg and Brock Lesnar are examples. I think Goldberg had a grudging admiration for the fan interaction and the physical competitiveness, but constant backbiting in the WCW locker room at the height of the Monday Night War made him paranoid to the point of misery. I don't think Lesnar really cared about fan reaction or even fame, but he did enjoy smashing his 6'3", 295-pound frame into other human beings. In Lesnar's case, I was amazed that someone with so little enthusiasm for wrestling was so great at it.

In just about every other case, success comes only to wrestlers who love the sport. Triple-H, Shawn Michaels, Kurt Angle, and Ric Flair are prime examples. Flair, arguably the greatest wrestler who ever lived, is still trying to find a way to get back in the game at age 60 without disrespecting Michaels or angering Vince McMahon. Some guys are so intent on returning to the spotlight that they're willing to tolerate any humiliation to do it. Any comebacks involving Roddy Piper or Jimmy Snuka come to mind.

So I think it's really the combination of three factors that drive these performers: a love of the art of wrestling, the performance, and the fame. Money is a motivator in all things,

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Grizzled veterans Mick Foley and Kevin Nash claim they hang around the sport at their advanced age for different reasons. Senior Writer Harry Burkett disputes Nash's claim that he's only in it for the money.

Photo by George Napolitano

While passion can be admirable, there is a downside, says Burkett. Flair and Piper, for example, are at an age where they should keep their passion for wrestling under control.

but I think—especially in the later years—it's simply a means of continuing lifestyles that came easily when these wrestlers were in their respective primes. Deep down, I think all wrestlers feel blessed to be paid anything to do what they do.

Of course, that changes when some wrestlers actually mature to become businessmen, start scrutinizing their checks, and figure out exactly how much revenue they bring to the company. But, again, I think only a slim minority make that a top priority.

A terrific aspect of being wrestling fans is the almost intimate relationship we have with the participants. That's because—unlike MMA, baseball, football, and other sports—wrestling fans are participants. In the final analysis, we truly influence what happens in the ring and determine overall trends, expressing our opinions through ratings, pay-per-view buy rates, and merchandising revenues.

This fact was really driven home several years ago when I was complaining about the state of wrestling at the time. My friend Daryl, who was on the other end of the phone, asked, "Have you lost your passion for the business?"

The question struck me as odd because I didn't think of myself as being in a position to have passion for the business. After all, I wasn't taking bumps up and down the coast. As a wrestling journalist, I've always prided myself as a detached observer. That really was a false premise, considering I'm a fan first and foremost. I replied, "No, I don't think I ever will." And I didn't feel the least bit like a mark in saying so.

I considered my friend Daryl, who was actually paying thousands of dollars to learn how to be a referee at a training school. I joked with him, asking if he'd been taught how to "count to three" yet. Daryl has since become a prominent referee on the indy circuit.

I also think of my buddy John. He has traveled throughout the eastern half of the U.S. attending wrestling shows, particularly Combat Zone Wrestling and other hardcore promotions. I asked John to name his most exciting moment in the wrestling business. He said it was seeing Tod Gordon's name on his caller ID. Incredulous, I asked why. John explained that he was often able to get panes of glass from work, and he'd become the point man for a number of indy promoters needing hardcore props at their events.

They have passion for the business, and don't care if they ever make a dollar from it.

I once visited a wrestling memorabilia shop near my hometown. Talking with the clerk, I learned he was an aspiring wrestling manager. I told him that was a gutsy career choice. The young man said he would be appearing at a wrestling show that very night. He explained it was low budget and the show was actually held on a farm.

Forcing my girlfriend, Debbie, to tag along, I followed his directions down long and winding back roads until I reached a long chicken house. Cars were parked all around the main opening and loud music was emanating from inside. We walked in. These impresarios had taken rolled carpets, canvas, and ropes and made a crude wrestling ring. The sound system near the "entrance ramp" was top-notch, however. They had also collected old couches, which they placed around the ring. They had bought canned sodas and small bags of chips, and were selling them at ringside for only a 25-cent markup.

The conditions weren't exactly sanitary. Chicken houses don't have floors. The ground is covered with sand, which chickens had probably been treading through. Some parents were even letting their kids play in the sand like they were at the beach.

All that aside, these "wrestlers"—which I had discovered were definitely in the backyard category—had driven hundreds of miles from all over the state. Each had gimmicks, entrance music, and, in some cases, basic wrestling ability. They didn't treat the event as a joke. They planned match finishes meticulously. One guy, in particular, was the spitting image of a preshrunk Triple-H. His theme music was provided by Motorhead as well.

I realized how the prohibition violators must have felt. I expected the cops to raid the place at any time. Debbie muttered, "I don't know how I ever got hooked up with you."

I didn't care. I have passion for the business. □

the straight shooter

By Dan Murphy

IN A BRUTAL one-two punch, Ring of Honor has lost two of its top stars, and it may be the death knell for a company already struggling to turn a profit.

Within a matter of weeks in late-summer, WWE announced the signings of two former ROH champions, Bryan Danielson and Nigel McGuinness. Not only were they the ROH's top two marquee stars, but in many ways they represent the soul of the company.

Back in 2000, as ECW was struggling with its television deal and house show attendance was dropping, the last remaining stars that weren't plucked up by the WWF and WCW during the Monday Night War left the company for other opportunities. It was obvious that ECW was falling apart. Even though the company had a passionate fan base, it was unable to earn enough revenue to stay ahead of expenses. By early-2001, it was obvious that ECW was on its last legs. Its headliners were gone, paychecks were bouncing, and events were being cancelled.

At the time, I had a naïve belief that Paul Heyman could turn things around. I had drunk the proverbial Kool-Aid. I was confident that ECW could survive that downturn and create new stars to replace those who had run off to the greener pastures of the WWF (or to the dying pastures of WCW). I ignored all of the signs that pointed to one foregone conclusion—ECW was not set up to succeed. It never had the financial resources or professional personnel to survive.

I'm not as naïve when it comes to Ring of Honor. There's no mistaking the signs. Barring a miracle, I expect ROH will be dead within the next 12 months.

ECW and ROH had very different models, but both were built largely on word-of-mouth campaigns. ECW built a fan base by presenting itself as a hardcore alternative to the relatively tame offerings of the WWF and WCW. It caught the attention of disenfranchised fans as well as fans who just loved blood, babes, and barbed wire.

Ring of Honor didn't resort to the gimmickry of ECW. It was always based on superior wrestling performances and featured a roster of gifted technicians and aerialists. ECW was low-brow and proud of it; ROH has always been snooty and high-brow.

But while ECW appealed to a

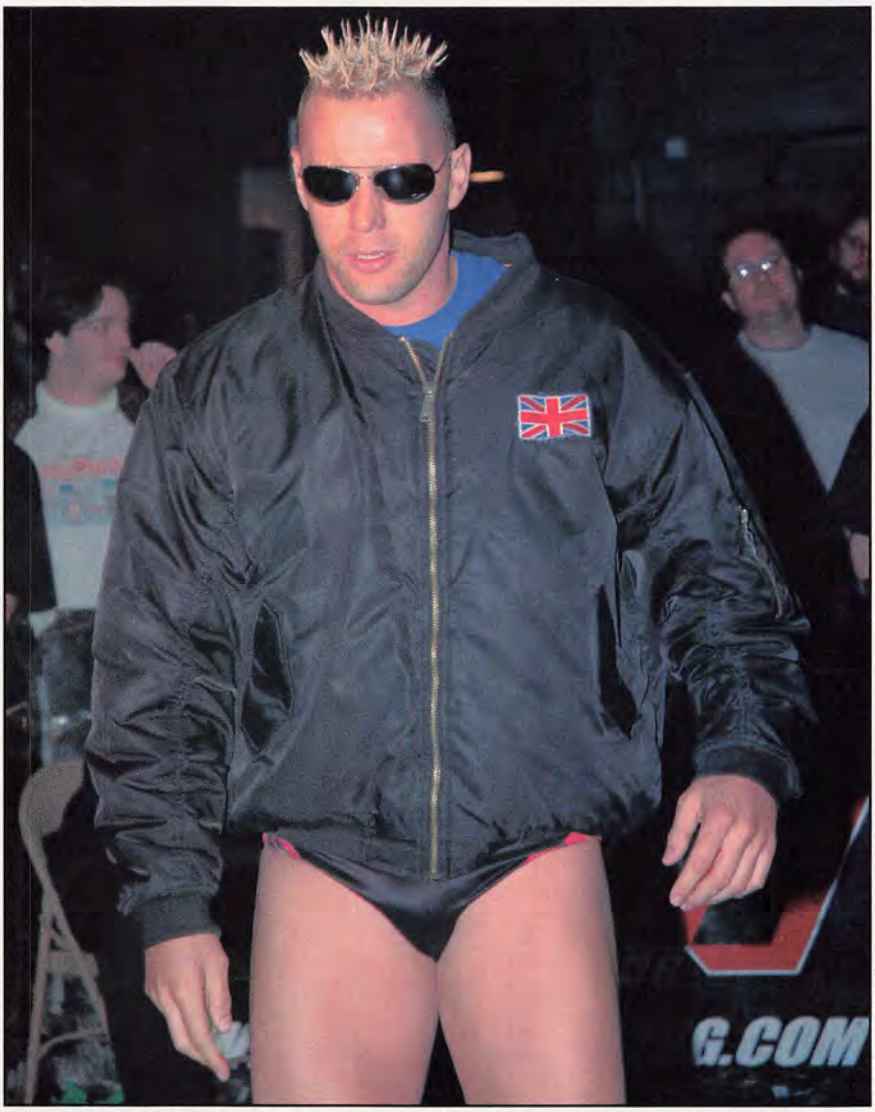

Photo by Joe Zanolle

The much hated Brit, Nigel McGuinness, knew how to get the fans in an uproar. Add on to that more than 540 days as champion, and ROH is losing one of its most recognizable stars. Only time will tell how the company will handle such a major loss.

widespread audience, Ring of Honor has a selective appeal. It attracts fewer fans for live events, and relies on DVD sales to keep the company afloat. But in this recession, DVD sales are down across the board, and Ring of Honor is no doubt feeling the pinch. In recent months, the company has enacted several cost-cutting moves, including cutting back on travel and running fewer events.

The controversial 2008 ouster of booker Gabe Sapolsky (*see "Press Conference," page 22*) was another sign that things aren't going well for the company. Sapolsky went on to sign on with Dragon Gate USA, another small company that caters to the same niche fan base as ROH, presenting ultra-athletic, competitive bouts and focusing more on work rate than storylines and feuds. Dragon Gate threatens to further cut into ROH's fan base. The pieces of the pie just keep getting smaller and smaller.

Photo by Joe Zanolle

If ROH wants to maintain its stance as the top independent organization in the country, some of the young stars are going to need to step up. Tyler Black, at just 23 years old, has the ability to become the face of ROH.

Ring of Honor fans know this already. They know ROH will never be mainstream. They take pride in the fact that the fans who thrill to John Cena and DX wouldn't recognize Austin Aries and Tyler Black if they bumped into them in the supermarket. Just as the ECW fans did a decade ago, they relish being outsiders. The difference is in the sheer size of that fan base. ECW's audience was so large that loud "E-C-Dub" chants were regularly heard at WWF and WCW events. ROH can't touch that level of brand dedication, though its core audience is very loyal to the company.

ROH survived the loss of Samoa Joe and Christopher Daniels. It survived the loss of C.M. Punk and the promotional war with CZW. It survived the loss of Sapolsky.

But how can it survive the loss of Danielson and McGuinness?

For years, Danielson has built a reputation as the best pound-for-pound wrestler in the world. Even when things looked bleak, ROH fans could take solace in knowing that Danielson was still part of its roster, that the "Best Wrestler In The World" still called Ring of Honor home.

That won't be the case any longer. And the man who replaced Danielson on the top of the card and strung together the second-longest reign in ROH history is following Danielson right out the door. Losing Danielson is a crushing blow; losing Danielson and McGuinness together could be a lethal blow.

ROH still has a television presence, and it still has its passionate fans. But ROH without Danielson and McGuinness is a lot like ECW at the very end, when the company lacked star quality and roster depth.

Nationwide, the unemployment rate is approaching the double-digit mark, the real estate market is still in the doldrums, and Americans are struggling under heavy credit burdens. The financial market is in rough, rough shape, and it's affecting businesses of every type. ECW wasn't immune from the business realities that eventually caused its collapse, and neither is Ring of Honor.

ROH needs to catch lightning in a bottle. It needs to find a new champion to carry the flag, or find a way to reconnect with the fans that have lost interest in wrestling. It needs to reach out, instead of catering to the same niche audience. If it doesn't, the "Five-Way Face-Off" will be down to four when this issue comes around next year. □

the trade's mark

By Frank Ingiosi

WHEN I WAS but a wide-eyed youngster in my 20s, my favorite player from my favorite sport retired. Embarking on the farewell tour—a right usually reserved for rock bands, yet has become all-too-common in today's professional sports industry—my favorite player made a stop in Philadelphia to take on the home team in his last appearance as an active participant.

Naturally, I scraped together whatever cash I could find in the hopes of getting down to the arena to root for (quietly, of course) my departing hero. Of course, you can only imagine the feeling of crippling disappointment that came when my favorite player was scratched from the lineup for the day's game. Regardless of my age, I remember thinking how bummed I was.

It was as if through the excitement and pageantry of sports that I was somehow transported back to eight-year-old Frank waiting outside of the arena with a handful of cards waiting for autographs. At that time in life, everyone seems larger-than-life to you and above all stands your favorite player. A legend among legends, a giant among men. The key, I've found, is recognizing greatness before is passes you by and rides off into the sunset.

There's nothing more depressing as a fan and writer than when a guy who deserves to be sent out in a manner befitting his career gets overlooked or underappreciated. While it seems almost asinine to think that about a guy like Sting—who has been rumored to have one foot in retirement land for years now—it's better to be overly cautious when it comes to, perhaps, the last genuine legend in the game.

If it feels like I've been banging this drum for the better portion of nearly four years now, you would be correct. When Sting made the decision to return to the ring with TNA in 2005, I could've been counted amongst the legions of fans who were intrigued to see what the veteran still had left in the tank. Initially, my thoughts were the same as many of my fellow fans. This was simply a name-grab by a fledgling promotion looking to build its reputation on the back of a great competitor who made his bones elsewhere. Soured by that thought, I have to admit that the prospect initially seemed grim as to what type of impact Sting could still have on the industry.

Photo By Lee South/TNA Wrestling

The 50-year-old, 10-time world champion has seen better days in terms of his wrestling ability. But, given his age, Sting is still in extremely impressive shape. Ingiosi hopes that "Stinger" bows out gracefully before he runs past his prime.

Still, that did not alter my opinion that regardless of how long the man chose to stick around, his presence should be appreciated and his work ethic emulated by every aspiring wrestler working their way into the business. Fan or not, it's hard to argue with Sting's importance to the proliferation of the industry throughout the 1980s and '90s. He never seemed to take a night off and always remained relevant. Truly one of the last—if not *the* last—of the old guard, Sting continued to prove his professionalism to fans everywhere.

At some point, it is safe to say, Sting will leave the industry, and while wrestlers do tend to waiver more on retirement than even Brett Favre, Sting will prove to be more steadfast in his decision. We all know—thanks to Jeff Jarrett's home invasion tactics—that Sting is a family man with a life outside of the industry. He doesn't need wrestling, let alone TNA, as much as both need him.

Of course, nothing is written

Photo By Lee South/TNA Wrestling

When A.J. Styles announced his retirement, Sting was the first one out to put an end to that talk. Sting still has the ability to elevate the young talent in TNA today, much like Ric Flair did for him.

in stone as to when the 10-time world champion will walk away from the industry, but through this past summer whispers grew into chatter, chatter into discussion, and, by early-fall, discussion into full-fledged speculation. While few genuinely look forward to the ending of a legend's career, all want to say that in some small way they were a part of the finale. I did it with my favorite player and I'm willing to bet that everyone reading this column has done it at one time throughout their chosen affiliations.

As hard as it is to imagine professional wrestling without Sting, it's even more difficult to think of what the man will take with him when he walks away. A throwback in the classic sense of the word, perhaps only the likes of an Undertaker or Shawn Michaels will remain to carry the mantle of a different time. While all three men have morphed over the past three decades in the industry, Sting stands out for remaining closest to what propelled him to stardom in the first place, and for that alone the man should be revered.

Realistically, it won't be a strained farewell tour or last run at the gold that will signal the end of Sting's career. No, it's more likely going to be a situation where he's spending some of his legendary capital to help elevate an up-and-coming competitor for the good of the business. Never one to shy away from a situation that made him look less than invincible, Sting has stated on the record time and again that his presence was as much about bringing the best out of young talent as it was to entertain the fans. When was the last time you read about an athlete that put the industry above himself?

In a strange way, it's fitting that Sting would leave the industry after Ric Flair, who essentially served in that same role to him. For whatever both men's perceived technical in-ring shortcomings may have been, it was their appreciation for the industry and invigorating showmanship that helped endear them to generations of fans. It may be a long while before anyone from this generation of competitors truly embodies that which made and continues to make guys like Sting, Flair, 'Taker, and Michaels special. Once again, and perhaps for the last time, my hope is that we, as fans, can appreciate what Sting brings to the table before it's too late. I know I regret never getting to see Mark Messier power down the ice one last time. □

DON'T MISS "THE TURN" WITH FRANK INGIOSI

EXCLUSIVELY ON: pwi-online.com

Ingiosi On The Michaels-Jericho Feud: "While watching both sure-fire Hall of Famers spew hatred toward each other on Monday night, I couldn't help but wonder: *Just how good will this be when all is said and done?* We are being treated to two of professional wrestling's greatest showmen and talkers going head-to-head in a series of thinly veiled personal attacks on each other. The seeds of the feud were planted months ago and, unlike most of what WWE puts on television, they were allowed to take root and grow."

Ingiosi On Paul Burchill: "Wow, Burchill went from goofy pirate, to OVW, to creepy sister-lover, to mid-card guy who used to be a pirate and creepy sister-lover in no time flat. Plus, making your debut during the down week of ECW is like getting traded from the Kansas City Royals to the Japanese equivalent of the Kansas City Royals, and no one notices."

Ingiosi On Vladimir Kozlov: "The involvement of Vladimir Kozlov—or, as we'll call him, 'Russian Khali'—following the match sort of doused the excitement. Of course, we understand that Russian Khali is apparently going to be a big part of the Smackdown main event picture. And, yes, it makes sense to introduce him right away, especially as a part of such a big night. But, still … why? Seriously, why? The man uses a headbutt for God's sake. We don't get it but, hey, we're not Freddy Prinze Jr."

Ingiosi On MEM: "No doubt it will be the collective egos of this group that eventually tear it apart from the inside. Still, we should enjoy the ride while we're on it. This should be the golden age of TNA. If this group were in WWE, it would be considered one of the 'greatest in wrestling history.' Yet, while it is the main angle of *Impact*, it still doesn't feel as if the Main Event Mafia has grabbed its rightful place in wrestling history just yet."

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You're at the airport. You see your favorite wrestler relaxing in one of the terminals. You rush up to him or her as questions fill your excited mind. There are certain things you just have to know about this person. Well, these are the 12 questions you'd never think of asking

12 questions

Portia Perez

1

What kind of training did you undergo to become a "Canadian Ninja"?

It mostly consisted of eating cookies, fighting moose, and watching *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* videos. The key is to wear both a toque and a ninja headband while training, to ensure equal parts "Canadian" and "Ninja."

2

Who is the one non-wrestling celebrity you would most want to meet and why?

I'd like to meet Miley Cyrus. Just so I can yell, "It's Miley!" upon seeing her.

3

Seriously, aren't you just too cute for wrestling?

Seriously? Seriously, I'd really like some waffles right about now.

4

What advice would you give any wrestler embarking on their first tour of Mexico?

I would tell them to bring food, a cell phone with really good reception, and whatever it is that cockroaches can't survive.

5

Which is cooler: MySpace, Facebook, or Twitter?

No matter how cool any of them are, none of them are as cool as portiaperez.com, where you can find all of the latest super cool Portia Perez merchandise. It is also free of cheap plugs, unlike this interview.

6

What's the best pick-up line a guy has used with you? And did it work?

I was a 1-2-3 Kid fan when I was little due to his ninjaness, and a guy once managed to dig up a 1-2-3 Kid fold-out poster from an early-'90s *PWI* and gave it to me to try to get me to talk to him. It didn't work, but the effort was impressive.

7

Can you remember the exact moment when you decided you wanted to become a pro wrestler?

I was very young. I've wanted to do this my whole life.

8

If someone tells you they're thinking of adopting a dog, what breed would you recommend?

I would recommend they find the right kind of dog for their lifestyle, and that they make sure they're ready for that kind of responsibility.

9

Which would you prefer: being able to eat anything without gaining weight, but have horrible body odor, or always smell like roses and balloon up after each meal?

I want to be able to eat whatever I want without gaining weight. It's my life's dream. And I smell like a rose when I sweat in the ring, so what effect can food have?

10

What was your scariest moment in the ring?

I woke up outside the ring one time, wondering why I was sleeping on my bedroom floor. When I finally realized I was in the middle of a match, I thought, *Yeah, that's not good.*

11

Who, other than yourself, would you say is the best pound-for-pound woman wrestler in the world today?

My Canadian Ninjas tag team partner, Nicole Matthews. Mere wrestlers can't compete with mad ninja skills.

12

So ... what are your thoughts on dating PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED senior writers?

I'm sorry, that's all the time we have.

Photo by Buddy LaMantia

The Wrestling Observer
Hall of Fame

In each issue, *PWI* will honor one member of *The Wrestling Observer* Hall of Fame, which we recognize as the sport's official Hall of Fame

BRET HART

HE CALLED HIMSELF "The Best There Was, The Best There Is, And The Best There Ever Will Be," and it takes a man with immense talent to be so bold.

Bret "The Hitman" Hart had immense talent.

Bret was one of 12 children of Helen and Stu Hart, the top wrestling promoter in Western Canada. Like several of his brothers, Bret followed in his father's footsteps and began training for wrestling as a teenager. He witnessed the infamously intense training regimens conducted in the Hart home's basement—dubbed "The Dungeon"—and learned the importance of training and conditioning.

Bret established himself as a standout amateur wrestler in high school and began working for his father's Stampede Wrestling promotion after graduation. He worked as a referee and manager before making his pro debut at 19 years old in 1976, frequently teaming with older brother Keith. Bret and Keith won the Stampede tag team title four times. With his believable ring style, amateur credentials, and strong work ethic, Hart became one of Stampede's top stars. He represented Stampede in tours with New Japan, where he faced fellow Hall-of-Famer Tiger Mask, and also had

The sharpshooter has claimed another victim, as the look on Bret Hart's face indicates. Few wrestlers in the history of this sport had a move set—and counter-move set—that could match the "Hitman's."

a rivalry with Tom "The Dynamite Kid" Billington.

In 1984, Vince McMahon acquired Stu Hart's Stampede promotion. As part of that deal, Stu secured WWF contracts for Bret, as well as his son-in-law, Jim Neidhart, Dynamite Kid, and Davey Boy Smith. Bret began teaming with Neidhart and the two, along with manager Jimmy Hart (no relation), adopted the name The Hart Foundation.

The Hart Foundation had a lengthy feud against Kid and Smith (known as The British Bulldogs), resulting in one of the most critically acclaimed tag team rivalries of all-time. With Bret supplying the speed, Jim the brawn, and Jimmy the brains, The Hart Foundation won the WWF tag team titles from The British Bulldogs in February 1987 and Demolition in 1990.

Hart first garnered attention as a singles competitor in 1989 when he feuded with fellow Stampede alumnus Bad News Brown. By 1991, Hart began competing regularly as a singles wrestler, winning the Intercontinental title from Curt Hennig at SummerSlam. Hart also won the I-C title a second time from Roddy Piper at WrestleMania VIII. Then, on March 12, 1992, Hart pulled off a major upset, defeating Ric Flair for the WWF World title in front of his countrymen at a house show in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

Hart's reign signaled the starts of a new era in the WWF. While the company was being investigated on steroid charges, Hart was a smaller wrestler without a powerbuilder's physique who helped popularize faster-paced, more athletic bouts after the Hulk Hogan era.

Hart went on to win the WWF World title five times and was one of the company's top stars from 1992 through 1997. He was only the second wrestler to win WWF's "Triple Crown" (World , I-C, and tag titles), and won the King of the Ring tournament in 1993. Hart was involved with three PWI Matches of the Year between '92 and '97.

After the "Montreal Screwjob" of 1997, it would be hard to imagine Hart and WWE reconciling. Indeed, they never really did, but Hart did accept entrance into the WWE Hall of Fame in 2006.

In 1997, Hart decided to take a contract offer from World Championship Wrestling. Fearing that Hart would not pass the belt to a successor, Vince McMahon devised a scheme involving challenger Shawn Micahaels and referee Earl Hebner. During the main event match at Survivor Series at the Molson Centre on November 9, Michaels trapped Hart in Bret's pet finisher, the sharpshooter. Without asking Hart if he wanted to submit, Hebner called for the bell, handed Michaels the title belt, a bolted for the locker room. This double-cross would live in infamy as "The Montreal Screwjob."

After angrily departing for WCW, Hart, as a member of the NWO, won the U.S. title four times and the WCW World title twice. However, with the instability and rapid title changes of WCW, Hart's accomplishments seemed hollow.

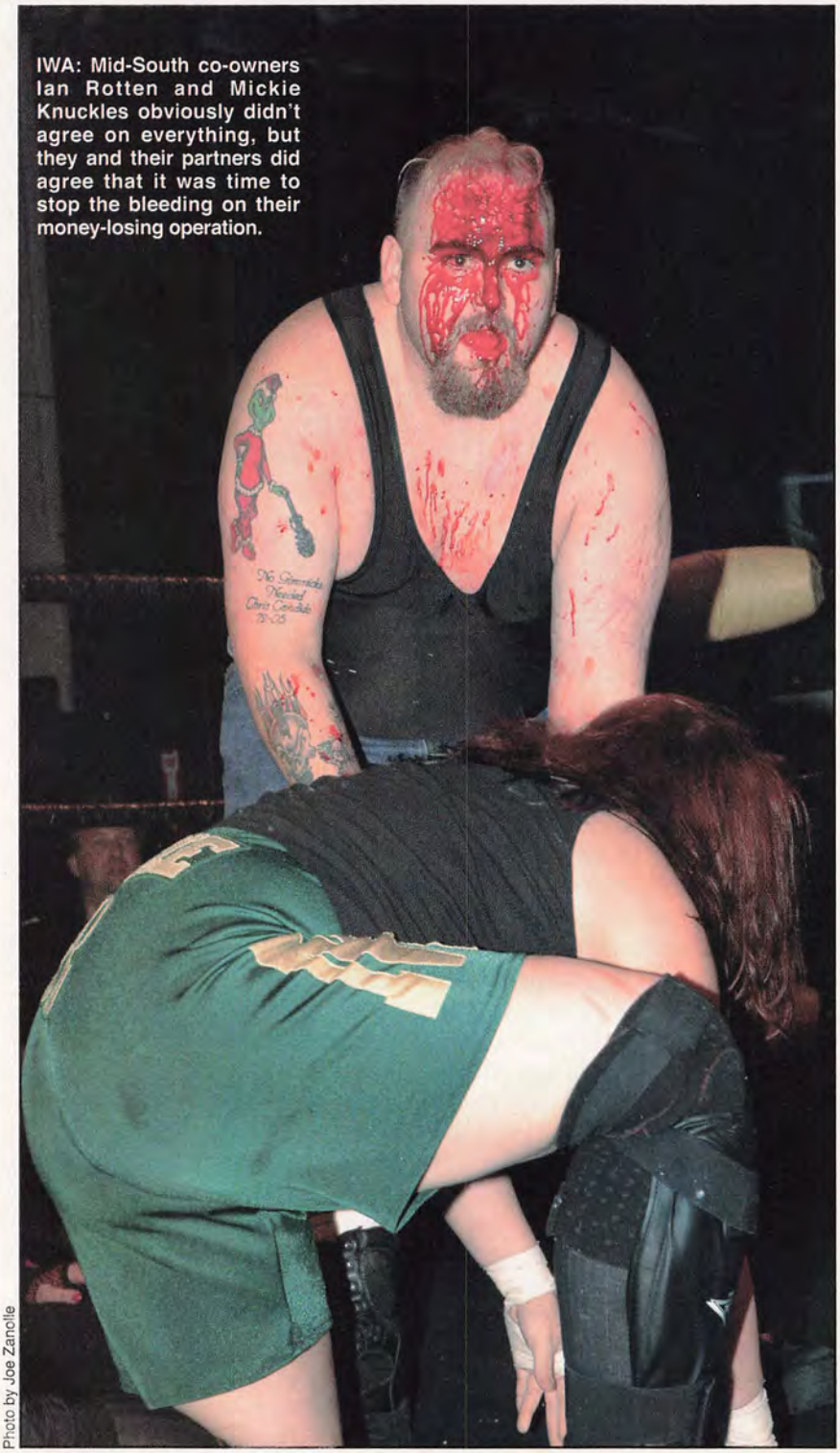
In 2000, he suffered a severe concussion in a match with Bill Goldberg that forced him to retire from wrestling.

Hart was the bridge between the Hogan era and the Attitude era. He was one of the finest technicians ever to compete in the WWF and one of the most influential stars of the 1990s. He was also at the center of the "screwjob" that became a pivotal moment in the Monday Night War.

A charter member of *The Wrestling Observer* Hall of Fame, Hart recently released his autobiography, *Hitman: My Real Life In The Cartoon World Of Wrestling*. □

independent roundup

By Al Alven



IWA: Mid-South co-owners Ian Rotten and Mickie Knuckles obviously didn't agree on everything, but they and their partners did agree that it was time to stop the bleeding on their money-losing operation.

Photo by Joe Zanolle

AFTER YEARS OF barely being able to stay afloat, IWA: Mid-South has officially ceased operations. The company's final show was held in Bellevue, Illinois, on August 28. Fittingly, the last match saw promotion founder **Ian Rotten** and **Mad Man Pondo** defeat **Elkview Adam** and **Viper** in a wild and bloody no-ropes, barbed-wire match.

Financial difficulties had long plagued the highly innovative promotion, which was best known for hosting two of the most notable—and diverse—annual tournaments on the indy wrestling calendar: The Ted Petty Invitational and King of the Death Match. Fervent fan support and DVD sales had bailed IWA: MS out in the past, but operating costs had reportedly gotten so high that the company was not able to sustain its website by late-summer.

"We simply do not have the money in order to continue doing business," read a statement signed by co-owners Rotten, his wife, **Patti**, **Mickie Knuckles**, **Jim Fannin**, and **John Calvin**. "It breaks our hearts that this day has finally come, but we just can't hang on any longer."

Rotten formed the IWA in 1996, shortly after his departure from Extreme Championship Wrestling. Originally a southern-based hardcore promotion, Rotten moved operations to the Midwest after the Kentucky State Athletic Commission imposed restrictions against its violent presentation. As a result, the company morphed into a hybrid showcase for hardcore, technical, and high-flying styles.

Over its 13 years of existence, IWA: MS was a proving ground for performers such as current WWE World champion **C.M. Punk**, TNA standouts **Alex Shelley** and **Chris**

Sabin, and indy stars Colt Cabana, Chris Hero, Jimmy Jacobs, and Tyler Black.

Two days after the final show, Dingo, the last IWA: MS heavyweight champion, showed up at a Lethal Wrestling Alliance show in House Springs, Missouri. Still in possession of the belt, he successfully defended it that night against Gary the Nightowl.

As of press time, there is no word on whether the LWA or other promotions will officially recognize the IWA: MS title. But Dingo has vowed to continue defending it at every opportunity.

While one iconic hardcore promotion is no more, another has been given a new lease on life.

Philadelphia-based Combat Zone Wrestling has been sold by founder John Zandig to longtime veteran wrestler D.J. Hyde. The transaction did not come as a surprise to the locker room or those who follow the promotion closely. Zandig had reportedly been looking to get out of promoting, and Hyde had gradually become more involved in running the organization behind the scenes.

Though some changes are expected, it is not likely that the creative direction of CZW will be dramatically altered.

Perhaps no other wrestler is more readily associated with the independent scene as "American Dragon" Bryan Danielson. The former Ring of Honor, Pro Wrestling Guerrilla, and Full Impact Pro champion is now WWE-bound, having signed with the company in late-August.

Ironically, Danielson kicked off his indy farewell tour against his original tag team partner and longtime rival, Brian Kendrick, who was making his first appearance after being released by WWE on July 31.

The match took place at PWG's Science of Sound event on August 28 in Reseda, California, with Kendrick coming out on top. Danielson addressed the crowd afterward, noting that he wished he could wrestle independently for the rest of his career, but that his "future medical bills" dictated his decision to sign with WWE.

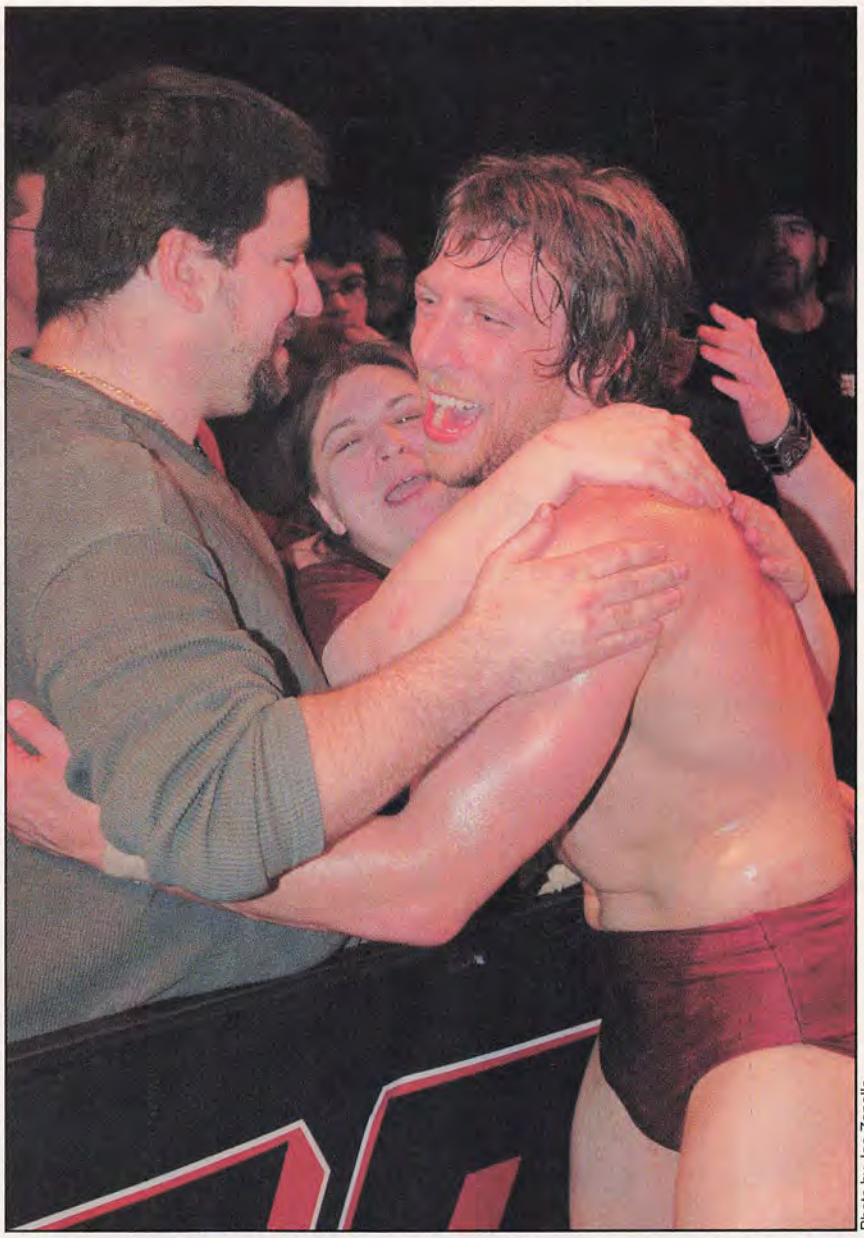


Photo by Joe Zanolle

The "American Dragon" said his good-byes to fans on the independent scene recently. After years of hearing he was the "Best In The World," he will finally have a chance to prove it on a much larger scale, WWE.

Kendrick, incidentally, signed a contract with Dragon Gate USA on August 6. He is expected to be a focal point of the upstart promotion, especially with the departure of Danielson, who had been primed for a similar role.

There are several major developments to report out of Ground Xero Wrestling's show on August 15 in Hopewell, Virginia, including the crowning of two new champions.

"The Tennessee Stud" Eddie Diamond defeated GXW heavyweight champion The Pharaoh in the final match of a best-of-five series to win the title. After the bout, The Pharaoh shook and raised Diamond's hand in a class move that he usually does not exhibit.

Earlier, "The Big Easy" Martin Stanley Fuqua beat "The Platinum Icon" Phil Brown for the GXW TV title, thanks to interference from "The Latin Lover" Diego DeLaRosa. After the match, DeLaRosa continued to attack Brown and was revealed as Fuqua's hired gun, promising to make life a nightmare for everyone in GXW.

In a unique move, GXW owner and president **Mr. Cullen** introduced Hopewell mayor **Brenda Pelham** as the new GXW commissioner. Pelham's first order was to appoint **"The Ace Of Spaces" Peter Spade** as her lieutenant commissioner, with the power to make decisions when she isn't present.

It was a summer to remember not just for **"Mr. Wrestling" Steve Corino**, but for his entire family.

On August 16 in Jackson, New Jersey, Corino outlasted **Greg Spitz**, **The Beast**, and **Tommy Thunda** to capture his 59th championship, the WORLD-1 heavyweight title.

Corino captured his 60th title by defeating **Dinn T. Moore** for the NWA Heartland States heavyweight belt on August 22 in Milwaukee. But it was his 12-year-old son who stole the spotlight that night.

After **"The Future" Colby Corino** defeated **The Golden Boy Taylor** by submission in under eight minutes, it was confirmed that he had become the youngest wrestler in the 61-year history of the National Wrestling Alliance to win a sanctioned match.

Judas Young is the new undisputed Independent Superstars of Professional Wrestling heavyweight champion after besting **Danny Inferno**, 5-4, in a classic 60-minute Iron Man match on August 22 in Freehold, New Jersey.

The main event of War to Settle the Score was instantly hailed as one of the greatest matches in ISPW history and in the respective careers of Young and Inferno. Unfortunately for Young, he didn't have much time to savor the victory, as the undefeated **"Detonator" Rick Fuller** was immediately announced as his top contender.

Company owner **Tommy Fierro** and five-time champion **Ace Darling** opened the show by inducting **The Iron Shiek** into the ISPW Hall of Fame. Sheik, who served as ISPW general manager several years back, joined Darling as the second man to be enshrined.

This has been a difficult year with regard to tragic deaths on the independent scene. In recent issues, we have reported on the passing of wrestlers **Tim "Tank" Robertson** and **Damien Steele**, and manager **Barry Casino**. Sadly, there are two more deaths to report.

Carolina wrestler **"Primetime" Brian Linder** was killed in a traffic accident on the morning of August 23. Linder, 35, began wrestling in 2000 for the Professional Wrestling Federation in North Carolina. He worked as an educator and football coach in his hometown of Gaffney, South Carolina, and was an assistant principal at Whitlock Junior High School at the time of his passing.

On August 26, Southern California-based performer **Peter Goodman** died after an apparent overdose of pain pills; he was 29. Goodman trained at **Rick Bassman**'s Ultimate University and went on to become a regular with Impact Zone Wrestling, the Alternative Wrestling Show, and NWA Pro.

"Peter leaves a legacy of being a great in-ring performer and an amazing personality both in and out of the ring," read an official IZW release. "He'll forever be a part of IZW history."

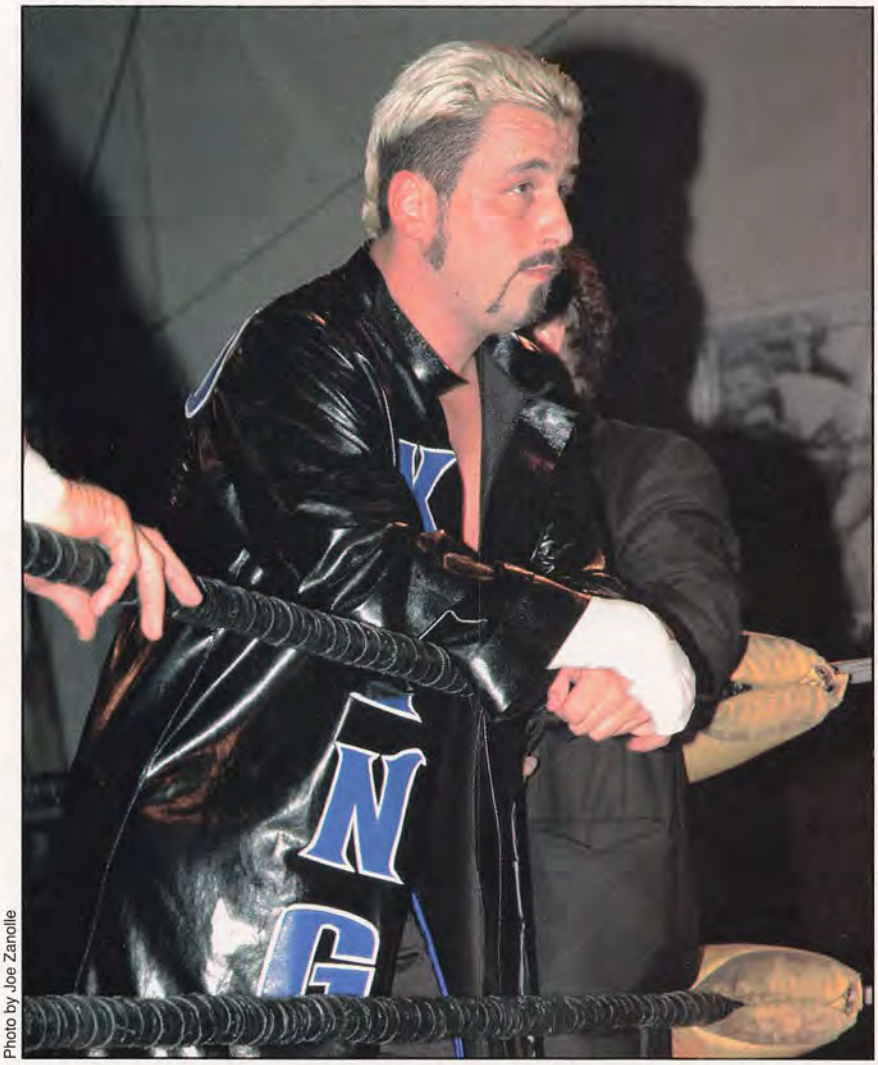


Photo by Joe Zanolle

The Corino family was on cloud nine recently. Son Colby became the youngest person to win a sanctioned NWA match at age 12. And dad Steve captured his 60th title of his career.

Recent Title Changes:

Asylum Championship Wrestling, Colorado Springs, CO, August 15: **Steve Williams** beat **Franco D'Angelo** to win the heavyweight championship … **Joey Kincaide** defeated **Father Zane Morris** for the Institutional title … ***All American Pro Wrestling, Mascoutah, IL, August***

Photo by George Napolitano

Judas Young (pictured) and Danny Inferno's 60-minute Iron Man match is being hailed as one of the all-time greats in ISPW. After a clean victory, Young was given little time to soak it all in as he was immediately told who would be gunning for him next.

22: **The Money-Makin' Jam Boys** (**The Mississippi Madman** & **K.C. Jackson**) defeated **Ax Allwardt** & **Homicidal Steven Davis** in a ladder match to win the tag team title … ***Great North Wrestling Alliance, Keswick, ON, August 22:*** **Jet Starr** won a 12-man battle royal to claim the heavyweight title … ***Michigan Wrestling Organization, Flint, MI, August 22:*** **Double Jeopardy** beat **Jason Clouse** & **Jaysen Platinum** to win the tag team title … ***Southeastern Xtreme Wrestling, Dothan, AL, August 22:*** **The Cherokee Warrior** defeated **The Mexican Kid** in a no-DQ match to win the U.S. championship … ***Keystone State Wrestling Alliance, Pittsburgh, PA, August 29:*** **Shane Starr** & **Lou Martin** defeated **The Blood Beast** & **The Latin Assassin** to win the tag team title … ***Insanity Pro Wrestling, Indianapolis, IN, August 29:*** **Apollo Starr** defeated **Scotty Vortekz** to win the championship … ***Revolutionary Championship Wrestling, Jackson, OH, August 29:*** **Flash Fury** pinned **Dirk Extreme** to win the heavyweight title … **Trik Nasty** & **Juggulator** beat **Onyx** & **Ace Gigolo** to capture the tag team title … ***Top Rope Promotions, New Bedford, MA, August 30:*** **The Midnight Prowlers** upset **The Alden Brothers** (**Shane** & **Eric**) to win the tag team title. □

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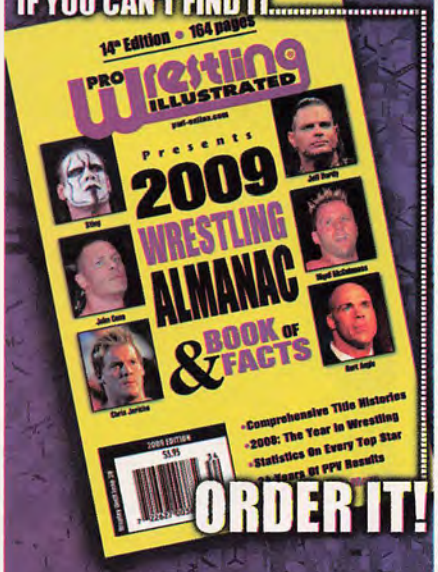

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the international report

By Bill Meltzer

NEW JAPAN PRO WRESTLING recently generated nationwide press when it announced the return of **Akebono** at its Blue Justice event. The sumo legend teamed up with **Yuji Nagata** against the American heel duo of **Karl "Machine Gun" Anderson** and **Giant Bernard**. In mainstream press interviews, Nagata and Akebono stated that they'd been talking about forming a tag team for a long time and would like to continue teaming in the future.

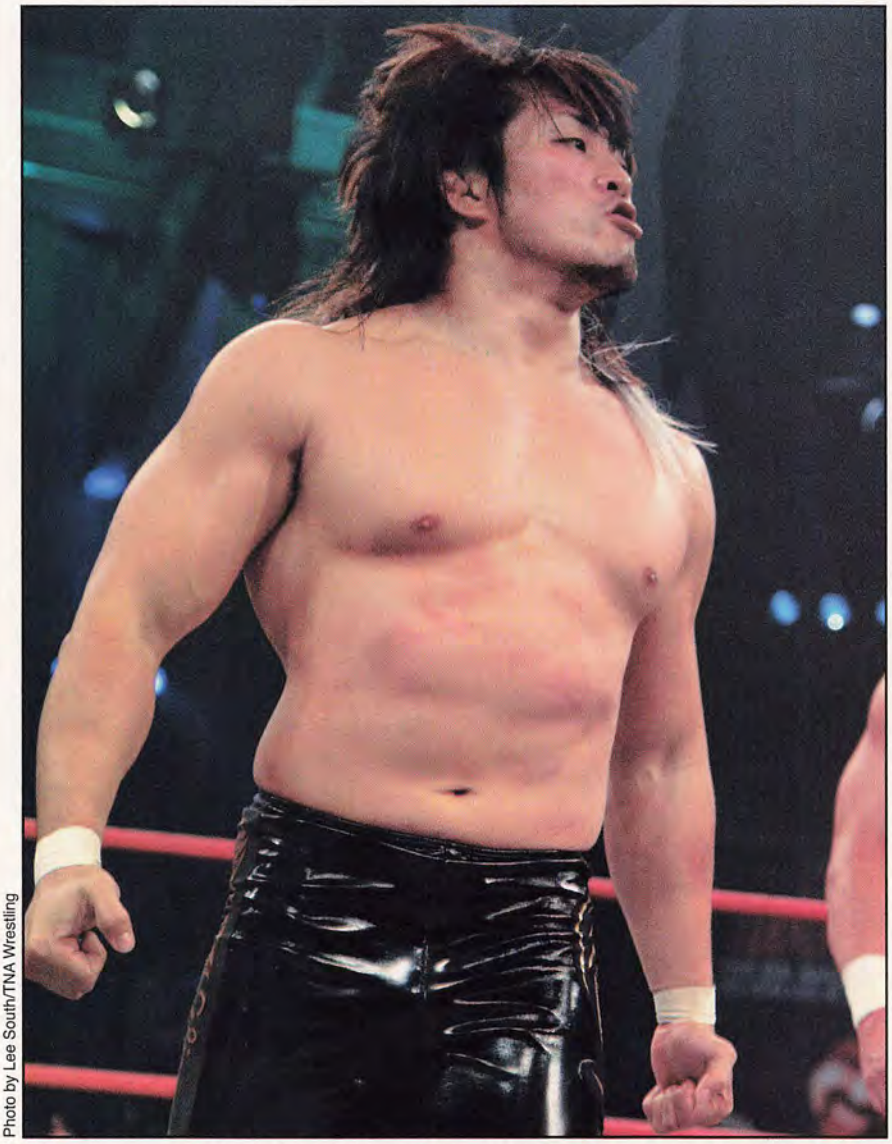

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

A fractured eye socket has forced Hiroshi Tanahashi to relinquish the IWGP title he had won from Manabu Nakanishi two months earlier. The title was to be filled by the winner of a series of matches between former champion Shinsuke Nakamura and G1 tournament winner Togi Makabe.

Nagata has also resumed hostilities with former tag team partner and 2001 G1 Tag League co-winner **Takashi Iizuka**. After trading wins in specialty matches throughout the year, their feud seemed to be winding down. That is, until they faced off in this year's installment of the G1 tournament. Iizuka goaded Nagata into getting disqualified in the quarterfinals, drawing a shocked reaction from the crowd. Not only are fans accustomed to clean finishes, but Iizuka had been winless in the tourney.

Hiroshi Tanahashi has vacated the IWGP heavyweight title as a result of a serious eye injury suffered when he was on the receiving end of a brutal Boma Ye from **Shinsuke Nakamura** as the G1 Climax ended. To fill the vacancy, Nakamura was scheduled to oppose G1 tournament winner **Togi Makabe** in a series of matches.

Ricky "The Dragon" Steamboat successfully teamed up with son **Ricky Steamboat Jr.** to defeat **Orlando Colon** and **Hiram Tua** at the World Wrestling Council's Summer Madness event in Bayamon, Puerto Rico. The elder Steamboat, who has been sporting gray hair in recent years, came to the ring with his hair dyed the black color of his youth. The card's co-headline match saw **BJ** wrestle **Noriega** to unify the Universal championship. Noriega use a chair to knock out and pin BJ, but an outside official reversed the decision, setting up a rematch. Before storming from the ring, an enraged Noriega took a scissors and cut off some of BJ's hair.

AAA poked fun at its recent

behind-the-scenes troubles with the Televisa network with a storyline that coincided with the return of **Konnan**. With no announcers in sight, Konnan and **Arturo Rivera** showed up at ringside, demanding to speak to **Joaquin Roldan** and appointing themselves as the announcers for the show. Konnan also told Roldan that he couldn't be legally suspended and was within his rights to sit behind the announcing table. Of late, AAA has been having problems with Televisa, largely stemming from the promotion signing a new TV deal with FOX Sports Espanol and wanting to run pay-per-view events.

In a short but fast-paced match filled with near-falls, **Mistico** defeated **Tiger Mask IV** at Sumo Hall in Tokyo to become the new IWGP junior heavyweight champion. After a series of close calls, Mistico finally landed his Mistica finisher at the 12:36 mark. Shortly thereafter, the two joined forces as a tag team, donning special masks to team up at **Ultimo Dragon**'s Dragomania IV event. Since winning the belt, Mistico has already defeated **Negro Casas** in a best-of-three-falls match conducted under CMLL rules. Next on the agenda: The legendary **Jushin "Thunder" Liger** is scheduled to head to Mexico to challenge Mistico on his home turf.

Another Japanese wrestling legend, 46-year-old **Masahiro Chono**, has been trying to work his way in singles match shape. "Black Charisma" recently downed **Poison Sawada** (a former New Japan dojo protégé) in an evenly contested match at Sumo Hall. Chono, who has appeared in the ring very infrequently this year, said afterward that his main motivation for seeking a more active schedule is the aforementioned injury-related absence of Hiroshi Tanahashi. Chono also stated that he sees his current role as being more of a standby performer for New Japan, and isn't sure his presence in the ring is in great demand anymore with a new generation of talent leading the company.

Photo by Koichi Yoshizawa

Masahiro Chono is slowly working himself into shape after wrestling only part-time for the last few years. The former NWA and IWGP champ has no illusions of grandeur, but would like to be able to step in when New Japan needs bodies.

The climax of the recent Power Trip Wrestling tour in England got off to a rocky start but was rescued by a very well-received main event that saw PTW champion **Connor Hurley** retain the championship by defeating PTW British champion **G "The Lap Dancing Superstar."** The card on the Isle of Sheppey very nearly didn't get off the ground, as most of the wrestlers on the show arrived after the scheduled starting time due to massive traffic problems. This understandably left PTW promoter **Petey Staniforth** extremely worried. The agitated promoter got into a pull-apart altercation in the parking lot with **"100 Percent" Dan Edge** before the card even began.

In one of the more notable midcard bouts at the PTW tour finale, **Sean Midnight** defeated **Mad Mike** in a submission match. The bout was notable in part because Midnight had **Tracey Kilby** in his corner. Kilby's father, **Alan Kilby**, is considered a wrestling legend throughout the U.K., while Midnight is one of wrestling's first deaf stars. The vanquished Mike had Staniforth in his corner for the match.

Despite his visible role in recent AAA storylines, **El Oriental** has decided to leave the company due to creative differences with management over the direction of his character. Oriental had recently formed a faction called **Los Yakuza** (The Japanese Mafia) along with **Kenzo Suzuki** and **Sugi San**. For the time being, El Oriental is back to wrestling independent shows.

The Australian Wrestling Federation recently announced that former WWE wrestler **Kizarny** will be touring Australia for the AWF. In the meantime, Australian Commonwealth champion **Powerhouse Theo** has racked up a series of clean wins over many of the continent's headliners, including New Zealand heavyweight **Vinny Dunn**, **Adam Hoffman**, **Steve Ravenous**, and **NC Viper**. AWF reportedly plans to elevate **"Mint Condition" Mick Moretti** and **"Spaceboy" Jason Dacey** to main-event status in the near future as Theo's next challengers.

Shocker has introduced a new protégé for his **Los Guapos** (The Handsome Ones) faction in EMLL. Going by the name of **Jon Strongman**, the wrestler is the former **"Strongman" Jon Andersen**, most recently of the California-based Pro Wrestling Revolution independent promotion. □

arena reports

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Spotlight Card of the Month

ORLANDO—TNA Hard Justice at Universal Studios: **Daniels** defeated **Suicide**, **Chris Sabin**, **Amazing Red**, **Alex Shelley**, **Jay Lethal**, and **Consequences Creed** in an X division Steel Asylum match ... **Abyss** defeated **Jethro Holliday** ... **Hernandez** defeated **Rob Terry** ... IWGP tag team champions **The British Invasion** (**Doug Williams** & **Brutus Magnus**) beat **Beer Money Inc.** (**Robert Roode** & **James Storm**) ... **ODB** won the Knockouts championship when **Cody Deaner** pinned **Velvet Sky** in a tag team match with the Knockouts title on the line ... **Samoa Joe** defeated X division champion **Homicide** to win the title ... World tag team champions **Scott Steiner** & **Booker T** beat **Team 3-D** (**Brother Ray** & **Brother Devon**) ... **Kevin Nash** beat **Mick Foley** to win the Legends title ... World champion **Kurt Angle** defeated **Sting** and **Matt Morgan**.
(08-16-09)

—Spotlight photos by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

UNITED STATES

ARIZONA

PHOENIX—WWE Smackdown at the U.S. Airways Arena: **Matt Hardy** & **John Morrison** defeated **The Hart Dynasty** (**Tyson Kidd** & **David Hart Smith**) ... **Melina** beat **Layla El** ... Intercontinental champion **Rey Mysterio Jr.** beat **Kane** by DQ ... **Chris Jericho** vs. **Shad Gaspard** ended in a no-contest ... World champion **C.M. Punk** beat **Jeff Hardy** in a cage match.
(08-25-09)

—Steve Beyer

ARKANSAS

RUSSELLVILLE—Mid-South Pro Wrestling at the LV Williamson Boys & Girls Club: International champion **Tim Storm** pinned **Kaleb Kastle** ... **Rick Sweetan** beat **Dustin Anderson** ... **Prince Al Farat** defeated **Chas Cardington** ... **Mark Johnson** beat Prince Al Farat ... **Athena** pinned **Malia Hosaka** ... **Jeff Jett** beat **Buddy Landell** by DQ ... **Matt Riviera** wrestled **Jay Lethal** to a no-contest ... Matt Riviera & Jay Lethal beat **Dark Circle**.
(09-12-09)

—Blake Cowling

CALIFORNIA

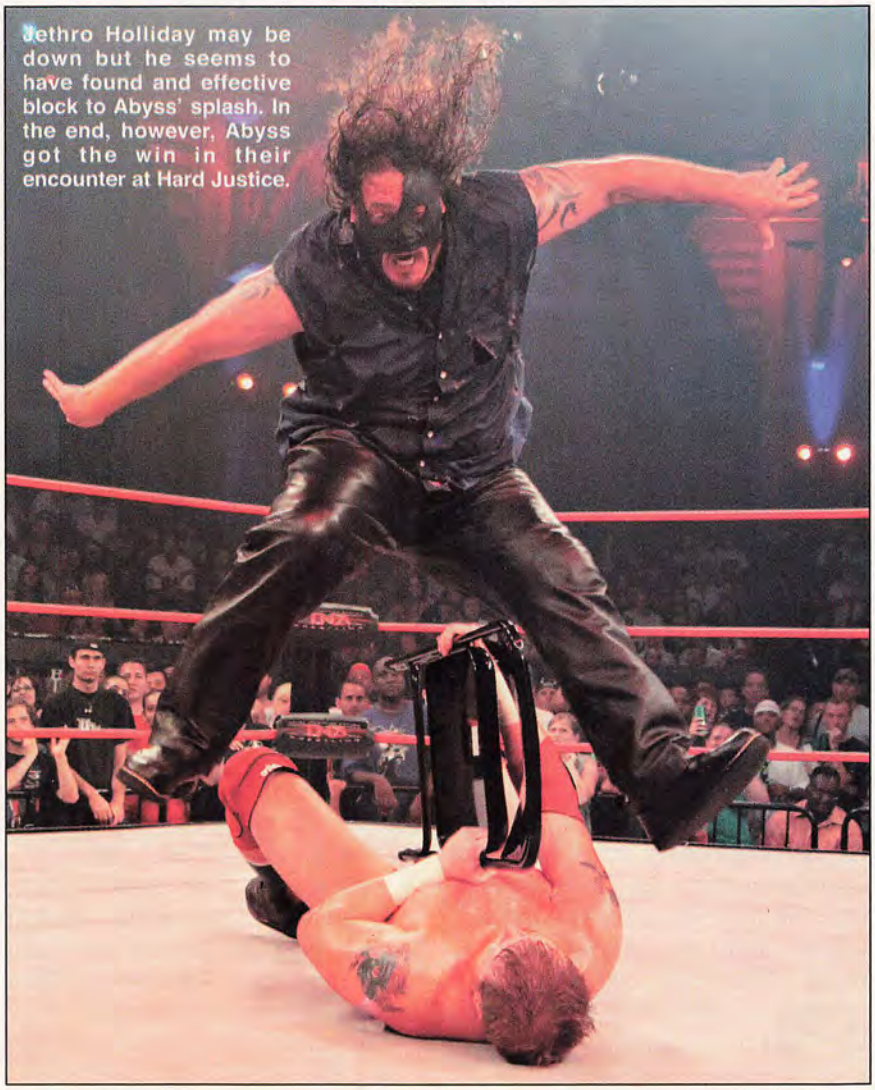
OCEANSIDE—SoCal Pro Wrestling at the Boys & Girls Club: **Johnny Yuma** defeated **Todd Chandler** ... **Scott Lost** defeated **Shane Haste** ... **Johnny Goodtime** defeated **Adam Pearce** in an Oceanside Streefight ... **The Ballard Brothers (Shane** & **Shannon)** defeated **Cool Imagery (Ricky Mandel** & **Hector Canales)** in a Penalty Box match to become the new tag team champions ... **Marcius Pitsonopolus** beat **Peter Avalon** ... **SoCal Crazy** & **Locura** defeated **Tommy Wilson** & **Jason Redondo**.
(09-15-09)

—Chad Simplicio

CONNECTICUT

UNCASVILLE—WWE Raw at the Mohegan Sun Arena: **Jack Swagger** defeated **Evan Bourne** ... **Beth Phoenix** & **Jillian Hall** beat **Mickie James** & **Gail Kim** ... **Legacy** (**Cody Rhodes** & **Ted DiBiase Jr.**) defeated **Triple-H** in a handicap match ... **Carlito** beat **Primo** ... **Mark Henry** defeated **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** ... U.S. champion **Kofi Kingston** beat **The Big Show** by DQ ... **John Cena** defeated **The Miz** in a lumberjack match.
(08-03-09)

—Brandi Mankiewicz



Jethro Holliday may be down but he seems to have found and effective block to Abyss' splash. In the end, however, Abyss got the win in their encounter at Hard Justice.

FLORIDA

TAMPA—Pro Wrestling Fusion at the Temple Terrace Rec Center: **Doug Basham** defeated **Francisco Ciatso** ... **Steve Madison** beat **Sinn Bodhi** ... **Michael Patrick** & **Mickey McCoy** beat **Craig Classic**, **Johnny Vandal**, & **Bobby Buhtol** in a two-on-three handicap match ... Cruiserweight champion **Chris Jones** defeated **Jerrelle Clark** ... **Prince Iaukea** beat **Nick Primo** ... **Buck Quartermaine** beat **Chris Nelson** ... **Freedom Ryder** defeated heavyweight champion **The Sheik** by DQ ... Freedom Ryder & Steve Madison beat The Sheik & **Bruiser Bradley**.
(09-05-09)

—Joey Schneider

ORLANDO—TNA *Impact/Explosion* at Universal Studios: **Kip James** beat **Seven** ... **The British Invasion** (**Brutus Magnus** & **Doug Williams**) won an eight-man tag team gauntlet match over **Team 3-D** (**Brother Devon** & **Brother Ray**), **Beer Money Inc**. (**Robert Roode** & **James Storm**), and **Scott Steiner** & **Booker T** ... **Cody Deaner** defeated **Tara** in a mixed martial arts match ... **A.J. Styles** & **Daniels** beat **Kurt Angle** & **Samoa Joe** ... **D'Angelo Dinero** defeated **Suicide** ... **The Beautiful People** (**Angelina Love** & **Velvet Sky**) beat Tara & **Christy Hemme** in a semifinal match of the Knockouts Tag Team Championship Tournament ... **Hernandez** defeated **Kiyoshi** and **Sheik Abdul Bashir** in a handicap match ... **Alissa Flash** beat Cody Deaner in a lumberjack match ... **Dr. Stevie** beat **Jay Lethal** ... Legends champion **Kevin Nash** beat **Mick Foley** by DQ ... **Sarita** & **Taylor Wilde** defeated **Awesome Kong** & **Raisha Saeed** in a semifinal match of the Knockouts Tag Team Championship Tournament ... X division champion Samoa Joe vs. **Matt Morgan** ended in a no-contest.
(09-01-09)

—Judith McCrory

ORLANDO—TNA *Impact/Explosion* at Universal Studios: **Sting** defeated **Rhino** ... **Doug Williams** beat **Suicide** ... **A.J. Styles** defeated **Chris Sabin** ... **Hernandez** defeated **Homicide** ... **Tara** & **Christy Hemme** defeated **Hamada** & **Sojo Bolt** ... A.J. Styles defeated Doug Williams ... Sting defeated Hernandez by DQ ... **Sarita** & **Taylor Wilde** defeated **Daffney** & **Alissa Flash** ... **D'Angelo Dinero** defeated **Jay Lethal** ... **The Beautiful People** (**Angelina Love** & **Velvet Sky**) defeated **Madison Rayne** & **Roxxi** ... **Abyss** defeated **Dr. Stevie**.
(08-31-09)

—George Tahinos

ORLANDO—TNA *Impact/Explosion* at Universal Studios: **Shark Boy** defeated **Q2** ... **Jay Lethal** beat **Slugga** ... X division champion **Samoa Joe** vs. **Suicide** ended in a no-contest ... **Awesome Kong** & **Raisha Saeed** defeated **Traci Brooks** & **Sharmell** ... **Jesse Neal** defeated **Rhino** by reverse decision ... **Abyss** defeated **The Motor City Machine Guns** (**Chris Sabin** & **Alex Shelley**) in a $50,000 Bounty match ... **Hamada** defeated **Daffney** ... **Daniels** & Suicide defeated Samoa Joe & **D'Angelo Dinero** ... **Sting**, **Hernandez**, & **A.J. Styles** defeated **Booker T**, **Scott Steiner**, & **Matt Morgan** ... **Beer Money Inc**. (**Robert Roode** & **James Storm**) defeated IWGP tag team champions **The British Invasion** (**Doug Williams** & **Brutus Magnus**) in a non-title streetfight ... X division champion Samoa Joe defeated **Homicide** ... Traci Brooks defeated **Sarita**, Awesome Kong, and **Christy Hemme** ... **Team 3-D** (**Brothers Ray** & **Devon**) defeated **Kurt Angle** & Matt Morgan in a tables match ... Knockouts champion **ODB** defeated **Alissa Flash**.
(08-17-09)

—George Tahinos

GEORGIA

GAINESVILLE—TNA Wrestling at the Gainesville Mountain Center: **Consequences Creed** defeated **Suicide** and **Sheik Abdul Bashir** in a triple-threat match ... **Taylor Wilde** beat **Daffney** ... **Hernandez** beat **Homicide** ... **Beer Money Inc**. (**Robert Roode** & **James Storm**) defeated World tag team champions **Booker T** & **Scott Steiner** in a non-title match ... X division champion **Samoa Joe** beat **Daniels** ... **A.J. Styles** beat World champion **Kurt Angle** in a non-title match.
(09-14-09)

—George Tahinos

DALTON—TNA at the Northwest Georgia Trade and Convention Center: **Suicide** beat **Shark Boy** ... **Daffney** defeated **Taylor Wilde** ... **Consequences Creed** beat **Homicide** ... **Hernandez** defeated **Sheik Abdul Bashir** ... X division champion **Samoa Joe** beat **Daniels** ... **A.J. Styles** & **Beer Money Inc**. (**Robert Roode** & **James Storm**) defeated **Kurt Angle**, **Booker T**, & **Scott Steiner**.
(09-12-09)

—George Tahinos

ILLINOIS

LaSALLE—Dreamwave Wrestling at the Knights of Columbus Building: **Nick Brubaker** defeated **Bret Gakiya** ... **Hades** defeated **Jim Neidhart** ... **Austin Roberts** beat **Prince Mustafa Ali** by DQ ... **Steve Boz** drew number one and went the distance in the Gold As Gold 20-man battle royal.
(09-12-09)

—Warren McNamara

Robert Roode momentarily takes out Brutus Magnus and Doug Williams with this double-clothesline, but the wily Brits eventually found a way to defeat Beer Money Inc.

Angelina Love and Velvet Sky seem to be having their way with Cody Deaner at Hard Justice, but Deaner was able to pin Sky and secure the TNA Knockouts title for OBD.

SALEM—Pro Wrestling Athletes at the Community Center: **Matt Cage** defeated **Helios** ... **T.K. Stryker** beat **The Kid** ... **Tim Donst** pinned **Chuck Taylor** ... **Davey Vega** defeated **Ricochet** ... **Gary Jay** beat **Neil Diamond Cutter** in a falls-count-anywhere match to become the Highrisk champion ... **The Hybrids** (**Donovan Cain** & **Jason Lyte**) defeated **The Hooligans** (**Devin** & **Mason Cutter**) in a ladder match ... Tim Donst beat Matt Cage and Davey Vega to become heavyweight champion.
(09-11-09)

—Patrick Brandmeyer

ROCKFORD—WWE Smackdown at the Metro Center: **Finlay** defeated **Mike Knox** in a Belfast Brawl ... **The Great Khali** vs. **David Hart Smith** ended in a no-contest ... Unified tag team champs **Chris Jericho** & **The Big Show** defeated **Cryme Time** (**JTG** & **Shad Gaspard**) ... Intercontinental champion **John Morrison** defeated **Charlie Haas** ... **Layla El** beat **Melina** ... World champion **C.M. Punk** defeated **Matt Hardy** by submission.
(09-08-09)

—Frank Krewda

ROSEMONT—WWE Raw at the Allstate Arena: **Montel Vontavious Porter** defeated **Chris Jericho** ... **Evan Bourne** defeated **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** ... **John Cena** beat **Cody Rhodes** by DQ ... **The Big Show** defeated **Santino Marella** in a Bodyslam Challenge ... **Mark Henry** defeated The Big Show in a Bodyslam Challenge ... **D-X** (**Triple-H** & **Shawn Michaels**) defeated **Chris Masters** & **Randy Orton**.
(09-07-09)

—Frank Krewda

INDIANA

VALAPARISO—WWE Raw at the University Arena: **Evan Bourne** defeated **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** ... **Primo** defeated **Alex Riley** ... **Chris Masters** beat **Santino Marella** ... **Gail Kim**, **Kelly Kelly**, & **Mickie James** defeated **Beth Phoenix**, **Rosa Mendes**, & **Alicia Fox** ... U.S. champion **Kofi Kingston** defeated **Carlito**, **Jack Swagger**, and **The Miz** ... **The Big Show** beat **Mark Henry** ... **John Cena** & **Triple-H** defeated **Legacy** (**Ted DiBiase Jr.** & **Cody Rhodes**).
(08-30-09)

—Frank Krewda

LOUISIANA

BATON ROUGE—TNA Wrestling at the River Center Arena: **Suicide** defeated **Shark Boy** ... **Awesome Kong** & **Raisha Saeed** defeated **The Beautiful People** (**Angelina Love** & **Velvet Sky**)... X division champion **Homicide** defeated **Consequences Creed** and **Daniels** in a triple-threat match ... **Hernandez** beat **Eric Young** ... **Beer Money Inc.** (**Robert Roode** & **James Storm**) defeated **Sheik Abdul Bashir** & **Kiyoshi** ... **A.J. Styles** beat **Samoa Joe**.
(08-08-09)

—Jean Harte

MICHIGAN

DETROIT—WWE Raw at the Joe Louis Arena: Heavyweight champion **Randy Orton** vs. **Cody Rhodes** ended in a no-contest ... Divas champion **Mickie James** defeated **Beth Phoenix** ... U.S. champion **Kofi Kingston** defeated **The Miz**, **Jack Swagger**, and **Carlito** ... **Mark Henry** defeated **The Big Show** by disqualification ... **Hornswoggle** beat **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** in a bullrope match ... **Chris Jericho** defeated **Montel Vontavious Porter** ... Beth Phoenix defeated **Kelly Kelly**, **Gail Kim**, **Rosa Mendes**, **Jillian**, and **Alicia Fox** in an American Dream Six-Diva Battle Royal.
(08-31-09)

—Pete Lilly

MINNESOTA

ST. PAUL—WWE Raw at The XCel Energy Center: **Evan Bourne** defeated **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** ... **Chris Masters** beat **Alex Riley** ... **Sheamus** defeated **Santino Marella** ... **Kelly Kelly** & **Gail Kim** defeated **Beth Phoenix** & **Rosa Mendes** ... U.S. champion **Kofi Kingston** beat **Montel Vontavious Porter** and **The Miz** in a triple-threat match ... **Mark Henry** beat **Jack Swagger** ... **Triple-H** defeated **Legacy** (**Ted DiBiase Jr.** & **Cody Rhodes**) in a handicap match ... **John Cena** beat **Randy Orton** via DQ.
(09-05-09)

—Pete Lilly

MISSISSIPPI

JACKSON—IWWA at the JSU Athletic Complex: **Cameron Valentine** defeated **J.D. McKay** ... **Mike Carter** beat **Reyes Morveno** ... **Precious** defeated **Ron Rage** ... **Rondale Roosevelt** defeated **Antonio Kato** ... **Jimmy Blaylock** beat **Tojo Yamamoto Jr.** ... **Kamala** defeated **Reggie B. Fine** ... **Buff Bagwell** & **C.J. Cash** beat **Pure Destruction** ... **Brickhouse Brown** beat **Cameron Valentine** ... C.J. Cash defeated **Sid Vicious**... **Rikishi** defeated Precious.
(09-10-09)

—Robert Wadsworth

MISSOURI

ST. LOUIS—Mid-Missouri Wrestling Alliance/Southern Illinois Championship Wrestling at the South Broadway Athletic Club: **Core** defeated **Ziggy Bones** ... **Purple Passion** beat **Moondog Rover** by DQ ... **Lumberjack Abe** wrestled **Blade** to a time-limit draw ... **Dave Vaughn** pinned **Waco** ... **Gary Jackson** & **Keith Smith** defeated **Phil E. Blunt** & **Shaft** ... Junior heavyweight champion **A.J. Williams** beat **Johnny Courageous** ... **Bobby D** defeated **The Big Texan** by DQ.
(09-12-09)

—Patrick Brandmeyer

KANSAS CITY—WWE Smackdown at the Sprint Center: **Dolph Ziggler**, **The Big Show**, & **Chris Jericho** defeated **Rey Mysterio Jr.** & **Cryme Tyme** (**JTG** & **Shad Gaspard**) ... **Finlay** beat **Mike Knox** by DQ ... **Maria** & **Melina** defeated **Natalya** & **Layla El** ... **Jeff Hardy**, **Matt Hardy**, & **John Morrison** beat **C.M. Punk**, & **The Hart Dynasty** (**David Hart Smith** & **Tyson Kidd**).
(08-18-09)

—Pete Lilly

ST. LOUIS—WWE Raw at the Scottrade Center: U.S. champion **Kofi Kingston** pinned **Carlito** ... **The Miz** beat **Evan Bourne** ... Divas champion **Mickie James** defeated **Gail Kim** ... **Montel Vontavious Porter** defeated **Jack Swagger** by DQ ... **Hornswoggle** beat **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** in a falls-count-anywhere match ... **Randy**

Orton & **John Cena** defeated Unified tag team champions **The Big Show** & **Chris Jericho** in a non-title match.
(08-17-09)

—Pete Lilly

NEVADA

LAS VEGAS—WWE Raw at the Thomas & Mack Center: **The Miz** defeated **Santino Marella** ... **Beth Phoenix**, **Alicia Fox**, & **Rosa Mendes** defeated **Mickie James**, **Kelly Kelly**, & **Gail Kim** ... **Montel Vontavious Porter** & **Mark Henry** defeated Unified tag team champions **Chris Jericho** & **The Big Show** in a non-title match ... **Hornswoggle** defeated **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** in boxing match ... **D-X** (**Triple-H** & **Shawn Michaels**) & **Vince McMahon** defeated **Legacy** (**Randy Orton**, **Ted DiBiase Jr.**, & **Cody Rhodes**).
(08-24-09)

—Stu Saks

OHIO

CLEVELAND—WWE Smackdown at the Time Warner Cable Amphitheater: **Dolph Ziggler** beat **Jimmy Wang Yang** ... **The Great Khali** & **Finlay** defeated **Mike Knox** & **Kane** ... **John Morrison** beat Intercontinental champion **Rey Mysterio Jr.** to win the title ... **Maria** & **Eve** defeated **Natalya** & **Layla El** ... **Matt Hardy** vs. World champion **C.M. Punk** ended in a double-disqualification.
(09-01-09)

—Aaron Biggs

CANTON—WWE Smackdown/ECW at the Canton Memorial Civic Center: **Cryme Tyme** (**JTG** & **Shad Gaspard**) defeated **The Hart Dynasty** (**Tyson Kidd** & **David Hart Smith**) ... **Mike Knox** defeated **Jimmy Wang Yang** ... **Sheamus** defeated **The Hurricane** ... **John Morrison** beat **Dolph Ziggler** ... **William Regal**, **Vladimir Kozlov**, & **Ezekiel Jackson** defeated **Tommy Dreamer**, **Yoshi Tatsu**, & **Tyler Reks** ... **Kane** defeated **The Great Khali** ... World champion **C.M. Punk** defeated Intercontinental champion **Rey Mysterio Jr.**
(08-31-09)

—Aaron Biggs

OKLAHOMA

SPAVINAW—Maximum Wrestling Alliance at Spavinaw School Gymnasium: **Lars Manderson** defeated **Blake Albright** ... **The Compound Varsity** (**The Canadian Red Devil** & **Justin Lee**) defeated tag team champions **Texas Inc.** (**Tim Rockwell** & **Bernard Funk**) by countout ... Heavyweight champion **Michael Barry** defeated **Mitch Carter** ... **Sugar Shane Morbid** defeated **Gary Gram** ... Southern tag team champions **The Jet Setters** (**Jack Legacy** & **Dustin Heritage**) beat **The Old School Express** (**Jason Jones** & **Jake Boulder**) ... **Jake Boulder** won a 13-man gauntlet Bash For The Cash battle royal to win $5,000.
(09-11-09)

—Mike Iles

PENNSYLVANIA

PHILADELPHIA—Ring of Honor at The Arena: **Kenny King** beat **Brent Albright** ... **D-Lo Brown** beat **Sal Rinauro** ... Tag team champions **The American Wolves** (**Davey Richards** & **Eddie Edwards**) defeated **The Young Bucks** (**Matt** & **Nick Jackson**) ... **Dark City Fight Club** (**Kory Chavis** & **Jon Davis**) vs. **Jay** & **Mark Briscoe** went to a no-contest ... **Eddie Kingston** beat **Claudio Castagnoli** ... **Necro Butcher** & **Grizzly Redwood** beat **Joey Ryan** & **Prince Nana** in a beard-vs.-beard match ... Heavyweight champion **Austin Aries** beat **Colt Cabana** ... **Chris Hero** defeated **Delirious**.
(09-11-09)

—Brady Hicks

PHILADELPHIA—Ring of Honor at The Arena: **Gino Giovanni** defeated **Danny Wade** ... **Super Smash Brothers** defeated **John** & **Brandon** ... **Kevin Steen** & **El Generico** beat **The Set** (**J-Sinn** & **Lance Lude**) ... **Delirious** beat **Sonjay Dutt**, **Joey Ryan**, and **Necro Butcher** in a four-way match ... **Brent Albright** defeated **D-Lo Brown** by submission ... **Kenny King** defeated **Eddie Kingston** ... **The Young Bucks** (**Matt** & **Nick Jackson**) and **Jay** & **Mark Briscoe** wrestled to a no-contest ... **Rhett Titus** defeated **Alex Payne** ... **Claudio Castagnoli** defeated **Grizzly Redwood** ... **Colt Cabana** defeated **Nigel McGuinness** ... **Kevin Steen** & **El Generico** defeated Super Smash Brothers ... **Chris Hero** beat **Bobby Dempsey** ... Tag team champions **The American Wolves** (**Davey Richards** & **Eddie Edwards**) defeated **Bryan Danielson** & **Roderick Strong**.
(09-10-09)

—Brady Hicks

PHILADELPHIA—Ring of Honor at The Arena: **Sara Del Rey** defeated **Allison Danger** ... **Bobby Dempsey** & **Tony Dees** defeated **Bruno Marciano** & **Gino Giovanni** ... **Eddie Kingston** beat **Orange Cassidy** ... **Sonjay Dutt** defeated **Delirious** ... **Joey Ryan** defeated **Roderick Strong** ... **Mark** & **Jay Briscoe** won the Honor Rumble when Mark eliminated **Eddie Edwards** ... Heavyweight champion **Austin Aries** defeated **Alex Payne** ... **Necro Butcher** and **Bison Smith** wrestled to a double-countout ... **Tyler Black** defeated **Rhett Titus** ... **KENTA** defeated **Chris Hero** ... **Kenny King** beat **Jerry Lynn** ... **Colt Cabana** defeated **Claudio Castagnoli** ... Heavyweight champion **Austin Aries** defeated **Bryan Danielson**.
(08-08-09)

—Brady Hicks

SOUTH CAROLINA

HARLEYVILLE—Champions With Attitude at the Harleyville Community Center: **B.J. Hancock** pinned **Johnny Flex** ... **John Skyler** pinned **T-Roy Jones** ... **Kristen Flake** & **Jennifer Blake** defeated **Rain** & **Amber O'Neal** ... **Suicido** defeated **Kid Williams** ... John Skyler & B.J. Hancock won a battle royal for the right to meet **Sixx** for the heavyweight title ... Heavyweight champion Sixx pinned B.J. Hancock and John Skyler simultaneously.
(09-12-09)

—Brett Wolverton

SOUTH DAKOTA

SOUIX FALLS—WWE Raw at The Arena: **Evan Bourne** defeated **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** ... **Chris Masters** defeated **Alex Riley** ... **Sheamus** beat **Santino Marella** ... **Mickie James** & **Gail Kim** defeated **Beth Phoenix** & **Rosa Mendes** ... U.S. champion **Kofi Kingston** beat **Montel Vontavious Porter** and **The Miz** in a triple-threat match ... **Mark Henry** defeated **Jack Swagger** ... **John Cena** defeated WWE champion **Randy Orton** via DQ.
(09-04-09)

—Pete Lilly

Homicide recently found a home in TNA's X division after Hernandez went down with a neck injury. Though he had his moments against Samoa Joe at Hard Justice, Homicide dropped the match and the X division title to the Nation of Violence.

Though the TNA Legends title is considered a sham by some fans, two legitimate legends—Nash and Foley—waged a bloody war for the strap. Foley was unable to hold off his seven-foot challenger.

Tennessee

JEFFERSON CITY—Lakeway Wrestling Alliance at the Jefferson City National Guard Armory: **Travis Austin** pinned **Barry Allen** ... **The Russian Crime Syndicate** beat **The Rebels** ... **J-Pac** pinned **Insane Lane** ... **Dewight Henry** pinned **Hellbilly** ... **Dave Pillman** beat **Casey Nelson** by submission ... **Raven** defeated Dave Pillman ... **Johnny Havok** pinned **Nightmare** ... Heavyweight champion **Menace** pinned **Edward Idol**.
(09-14-09)

—John Adams

TEXAS

FORT WORTH—Outcast Xtreme Wrestling at the Camp Bowie Arena: **Chuey Martinez** & **Michael Faith** defeated **Hotsauce** & **Genesis** ... **Xavier** beat **Adam Action** ... Junior heavyweight champion **Nobe Bryant** defeated **Diamond Dave** ... **Maddog 50** beat **Franco D'Angelo** ... Tag team champions **Old School Gangters** defeated **Chris Youngblood** & **Maverick** ... **Ricky Youngblood** defeated heavyweight champion **Seth Shai** by DQ.
(09-12-09)

—Kokina Lynn

HUMBLE—Texas All-Star Wrestling at the TASW Arena: **Scoby Gober** pinned **Chip Dumas** ... **Hector Montoya** defeated **Mysterious Q** and **Kaotix** in a three-way ... **Bret Basics** beat cruiserweight champion **Dylan Starr** by DQ ... **ZenZen** vs. **Gustavo Mendoza** ended in a double-countout ... **Nick Daniels** beat **Steve DeMarco** ... Heavyweight champion **Ryan Davidson** defeated **Bobby 2Badd**.
(9-12-09)

—Mike Garcia

FORT WORTH—Outcast Xtreme Wrestling at the Camp Bowie Arena: **Adam Action** defeated **Eric Kincade** ... **Li Fang** beat **Cervante** ... **Brent Masters** defeated **Seth Allen** ... **Old School Gangters** beat tag team champions **Michael Faith** & **Uncle Bobby** to win the title ... Heavyweight champion **Seth Shai** defeated **Chuey Martinez**.
(09-05-09)

—Kokina Lynn

BELTON—TNA Wrestling at the Bell County Expo Center: **Shark Boy** defeated **Kiyoshi** ... **Suicide** defeated **Consequences Creed** ... **Sarita** & **Hamada** defeated **The Beautiful People** (**Angelina Love** & **Velvet Sky**) ... **Bobby Lashley** defeated **Sheik Abdul Bashir** ... **Eric Young** beat **Jay Lethal** ... **Team 3-D** (**Brother Ray** & **Brother Devon**) & **Abyss** defeated **Kurt Angle** & **The British Invasion** (**Brutus Magnus** & **Doug Williams**).
(08-30-09)

—Jan Robertson

ABILENE—TNA Wrestling at the Taylor County Expo Center: **Shark Boy** defeated **Kiyoshi** ... **Hamada** & **Sarita** defeated **The Beautiful People** (**Angelina Love** & **Velvet Sky**) ... **Suicide** beat **Consequences Creed** ... **Bobby Lashley** defeated **Sheik Abdul Bashir** ... **Eric Young** defeated **Jay Lethal** ... **Team 3-D** (**Brother Ray** & **Brother Devon**) & **Abyss** beat **Kurt Angle** & **The British Invasion** (**Brutus Magnus** & **Doug Williams**).
(08-29-09)

—Marcus Mack

ROBSTOWN—TNA Wrestling at the RMB Regional Fairgrounds: **Homicide** defeated **Sheik Abdul Bashir** ... **Sarita** defeated **Angelina Love** ... **Matt Morgan** beat **Kip James** ... World tag team champions **Booker T** & **Scott Steiner** defeated **Beer Money Inc**. (**Robert Roode** & **James Storm**) ... **A.J. Styles** defeated X division champion **Samoa Joe** in a non-title match.
(08-21-09)

—Marcus Mack

WISCONSIN

MADISON—WWE Raw at the Coliseum: **Evan Bourne** defeated **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** ... **Chris Masters** beat **Alex Riley** ... **Sheamus** beat **Santino Marella** ... **Kelly Kelly** & **Gail Kim** defeated **Beth Phoenix** & **Rosa Mendes** ... U.S. champion **Kofi Kingston** beat **Montel Vontavious Porter** and **The Miz** in a triple-threat match ... **Mark Henry** defeated **Jack Swagger** ... **Triple-H** defeated **Legacy** (**Ted DiBiase Jr.** & **Cody Rhodes**) in a handicap match ... **John Cena** defeated WWE champion **Randy Orton** via DQ.
(09-06-09)

—Pete Lilly

INTERNATIONAL

CANADA

ALBERTA

CALGARY—WWE Raw at the Pengrowth Saddledome: **Gail Kim** defeated **Beth Phoenix**, **Kelly Kelly**, and **Alicia Fox** in a Fatal Four-way number-one contender match ... **Jack Swagger** beat **Evan Bourne** ... **The Calgary Kid** (**The Miz**) defeated **Eugene** in a Contract on a Pole match ... **The Big Show** defeated WWE champion **Randy Orton** by countout ... **Montel Vontavious Porter** pinned **Chris Masters** ... **Legacy** (**Cody Rhodes** & **Ted DiBiase Jr.**) beat **Mark Henry** & **Hornswoggle** ... **Chris Jericho** and **John Cena** wrestled to a no-contest.
(08-10-09)

—Dave Lenker

ONTARIO

HAMILTON—WWE Smackdown/ECW/Superstars at the Copps Coliseum: **William Regal** defeated **Hurricane Helms** ... **Yoshi Tatsu** beat **Zack Ryder** ... Zack Ryder won a 10-man battle royal, last eliminating **Tommy Dreamer** to win a shot at the ECW title ... Intercontinental champ **John Morrison** defeated **Mike Knox** ... **Melina** pinned WWE Women's champion **Michelle McCool** in a non-title match ... **The Hart Dynasty** (**Tyson Kidd** & **David Hart Smith**) defeated **Cryme Time** (**JTG** & **Shad Gaspard**) ... **The Great Khali** defeated **Kane** by DQ ... **Batista** defeated **Chris Jericho** ... ECW champion **Christian** beat **Paul Burchill** ... **Dolph Ziggler** defeated **Finlay**.
(09-15-09)

—Jimmy Harrity

TORONTO—WWE Raw from the Air Canada Centre: **Jack Swagger** & **The Miz** defeated **Primo** & **Kofi Kingston** ... **Alicia Fox** beat **Gail Kim** to become the number-one contender for the Divas title ... **Shawn Michaels** defeated **Ted DiBiase Jr.** by DQ ... **Hornswoggle** & **Evan Bourne** defeated **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** & **Carlito**

... **Trish Stratus**, **Mark Henry**, & **Montel Vontavious Porter** beat **Beth Phoenix**, **The Big Show**, & **Chris Jericho** ... **Batista** beat **Randy Orton** in a Mutual of Omaha no-holds-barred match.
(09-14-09)

—Jimmy Harrity

OTTAWA—WWE supershow at Scotia Bank Place: **The Great Khali** beat **Dolph Ziggler** ... **Sheamus** defeated **Goldust** ... **The Bella Twins** (**Nikki** & **Brie**) & **Gail Kim** beat **Natalya**, **Alicia Fox**, & **Jillian Hall** ... **Evan Bourne** defeated **Carlito** ... **Cryme Tyme** (**JTG** & **Shad Gaspard**) defeated **The Hart Dynasty** (**Tyson Kidd** & **David Hart Smith**) ... U.S. champion **Kofi Kingston** beat **The Miz** ... ECW champion **Christian** defeated **William Regal** and **Tommy Dreamer** in a three-way ... **Triple-H** & **John Cena** beat **The Big Show** & **Randy Orton**.
(09-12-09)

—Jimmy Harrity

QUEBEC

MONTREAL—WWE Breaking Point at the Bell Centre: **Evan Bourne** beat **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** ... Unified tag team champions **The Big Show** & **Chris Jericho** defeated **Mark Henry** & **Montel Vontavious Porter** ... U.S. champion **Kofi Kingston** defeated **The Miz** ... **Legacy** (**Ted DiBiase Jr.** & **Cody Rhodes**) defeated **D-X** (**Triple-H** & **Shawn Michaels** in a submissions-count-anywhere match ... **Kane** beat **The Great Khali** in a Singapore Cane match ... ECW champion **Christian** defeated **William Regal** ... **John Cena** defeated **Randy Orton** in an "I Quit" match to win the heavyweight title ... World champion **C.M. Punk** beat **The Undertaker** in a submission match.
(09-13-09)

—Bertrand Hebert

JAPAN

TOKYO—New Japan Pro-Wrestling at Korakuen Hall: **Tajiri** defeated **Tomoaki Honma** in three seconds ... **Masahiro Chono**,**Tiger Mask**, & **Akira** defeated **Giant Bernard**, **Karl Anderson**, & **Ishii** ... **Yuji Nagata** beat **Wataru Inoue** ... **Masato Tanaka**, **Jado**, & **Gedo** defeated **Hirooki Goto**, **Milano Collection A.T.**, & **Taichi** ... **Togi Makabe**, **Manabu Nakanishi**, & **Takao Omori** beat **Shinsuke Nakamura**,**Toru Yano**, & **Takashi Iizuka** ... Junior heavyweight tag team champions **Prince Devitt** & **Ryusuke Taguchi** defeated **The Motor City Machine Guns** (**Chris Sabin** & **Alex Shelley**).
(09-13-09)

—Dan Haney

PUERTO RICO

PONCE—WWE Smackdown/ECW at the Juan Vicens Auditorium: Unified tag team champions **Chris Jericho** & **The Big Show** beat **Primo** & **Carlito** ... **The Great Khali** beat **Kane** by disqualification ... **Cryme Tyme** (**JTG** & **Shad Gaspard**) defeated **The Hart Dynasty** (**Tyson Kidd** & **David Hart Smith**) ... ECW champion **Christian** beat **Shelton Benjamin** and **Tommy Dreamer** in a three-way dance ... **Melina** & **Eve** defeated **Michelle McCool** & **Natalya** ... Intercontinental champion **John Morrison** defeated **Dolph Ziggler** ... **The Undertaker** beat World champion **C.M. Punk** by DQ.
(09-06-09)

—Angel Rodriguez

Sting seems as happy as World champion Kurt Angle seems distraught. It would be Angle who would get that last laugh, though, as he outfought Sting and Matt Morgan to retain his title.

SAN JUAN—WWE Smackdown/ECW at Coliseo José Miguel Agrelot: **Matt Hardy** beat **Mike Knox** ... Women's champion **Michelle McCool** defeated **Melina** ... **The Great Khali** beat **Kane** by DQ ... ECW champion **Christian** defeated **William Regal**, **Shelton Benjamin**, and **Tommy Dreamer** in a four-way dance ... I-C champion **John Morrison** beat **Dolph Ziggler** ... **Primo** defeated **Carlito** ... Unified tag team champions **Chris Jericho** & **The Big Show** beat **Cryme Time** (**JTG** & **Shad Gaspard**) and **The Hart Dynasty** (**Tyson Kidd** & **David Hart Smith**) in a tag team triple-threat match ... **The Undertaker** & **Triple-H** beat **C.M. Punk** and **Legacy** (**Ted DiBiase Jr.** & **Cody Rhodes**).
(09-04-09)

—Angel Rodriguez □

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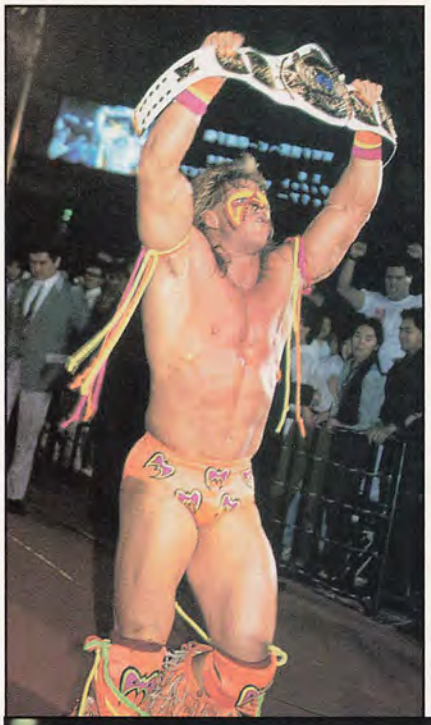
PWI classic

From the January 1991 issue of *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*



WWF vs. NWA: Which Is Better?

We've posed the question many times over the years (with some obvious alterations), but this was the first time. And with almost 20 years of hindsight, it's rather fun to read again

They're continually among the hottest debates in the sports world, and they're argued over in homes and taverns across our nation on a daily basis: Which baseball league is better, the American League or the National League? Is the NFC or the AFC the finest division in the NFL? Which division is dominant in the NBA and NHL?

In wrestling, the questions are similar: Who is the best champion? Which is the finest tag team? What is more effective, power or science?

And one more question, argued more intensely than the rest:

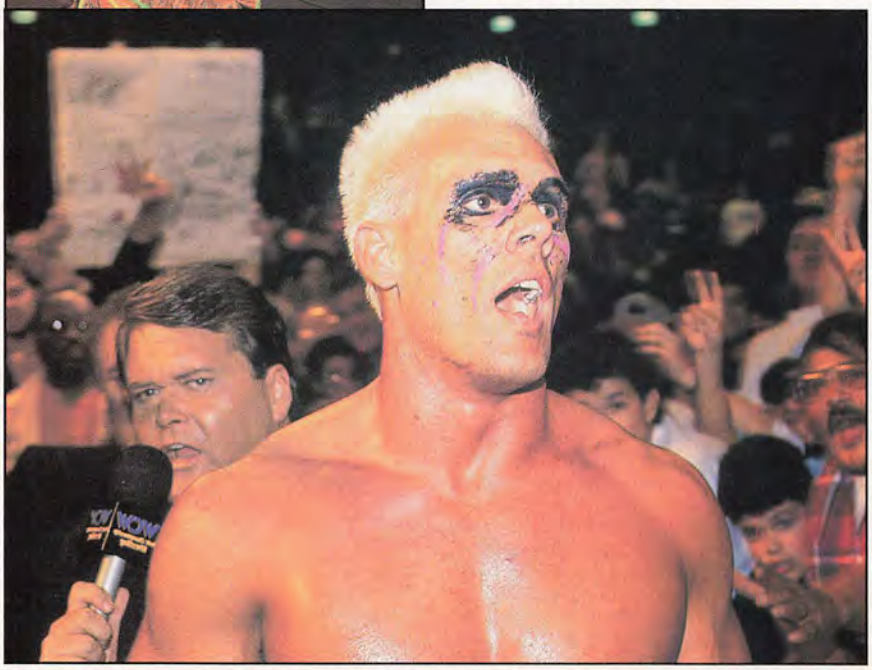
Which federation is better—the WWF or the NWA?

Today, it is clear that the World Wrestling Federation and the National Wrestling Alliance dominate the attention of the majority of American fans. Both federations enjoy the largest amounts of television exposure, and therefore are booked into the largest arenas, in turn generating the most revenue.

Plus, the WWF and NWA currently dominate the pay-per-view scene in this country. At press time, there had been six pay-per-view wrestling events offered to viewers during 1990, three by each federation.

It's clear that these two organizations are the leaders in bringing wrestling action to the American public. In this special section, we compare and contrast the WWF and NWA in seven important categories. We outline the various strengths and weaknesses in both federations, and make a determination of which federation has the edge in each category.

And, we hope, we give you enough of a basis to examine the question in depth for yourself and make your own determination as to which is better—the NWA or the WWF?



WWF World champion Ultimate Warrior (top) and NWA World champion Sting (above) both reached the pinnacle of the sport after training together five years earlier.

CHAMPIONS

The NWA traditionally has boasted an outstanding scientific wrestler as its World champion, and with Sting they've added another capable grappler to the list. Well-rounded in scientific skills as

The Hart Foundation (above) and Doom (bottom) were the standard-bearers for tag team wrestling in the WWF and NWA, respectively. While it's difficult to choose between these two teams, the depth of this division gave the NWA a clear edge.

well as brawling tactics, the young Californian is a worthy successor to Ric Flair, the *PWI* "Wrestler Of The Decade" for the '80s and a master ring tactician.

The Ultimate Warrior has been the WWF titleholder since defeating Hulk Hogan at WrestleMania VI this past April, but the massive New York native is more of a pure brawler than a complete wrestler. The Warrior's stamina is also an open question. Sting routinely competes in matches that last 30 minutes or more, while the Warrior usually tires after only a few minutes in the ring. On the plus side, the Warrior has dominated experienced foes such as Rick Rude, Haku, and Curt Hennig.

The WWF rates an edge with its secondary championship. Kerry Von Erich is the new Intercontinental champion, and he's a former NWA World champion (he defeated Flair in 1984) with outstanding scientific skills. U.S. titlist Lex Luger has held his belt since May 1989, and has been a top contender to the NWA World title since 1987, but wasn't able to win the World belt despite an inordinate number of opportunities.

This makes the score 1-1, but the world titles must certainly be weighted more heavily than the secondary titles.

Edge: NWA

TOP CONTENDERS

As noted in our sidebar ("A Ranking-By-Ranking Comparison"), the NWA has a 6-5 edge if both world champions are figured into the comparison. Without the world champions figured in, the sides are even (5-5). But drop off the Intercontinental and U.S. champions and the NWA regains a 5-4 edge in our hypothetical battle between contenders.

The WWF has an advantage in title experience: Five member of its top 10 (Von Erich, Hennig, Randy Savage, and Dusty Rhodes) are

PWI ratings

January 1991

TOP 10
1—Sting
2—Ultimate Warrior
3—Lex Luger
4—Kerry Von Erich
5—Curt Hennig
6—Hulk Hogan
7—Ric Flair
8—Arn Anderson
9—Larry Zbyszko
10—Rick Rude

TAG TEAMS
1—Doom
2—The Hart Foundation
3—Rick & Scott Steiner
4—Demolition
5—The Rock 'n' Roll Express
6—The Midnight Express
7—Al Madril & Rick Santana
8—Greg Valentine & Honky Tonk Man
9—Brian Lee & Don Harris
10—D.J. Peterson & The Trooper

NWA
Champion—Sting
1—Lex Luger
2—Ric Flair
3—Black Scorpion
4—Sid Vicious
5—Stan Hansen
6—Arn Anderson
7—Junkyard Dog
8—Tommy Rich
9—Mike Rotundo
10—Dan Spivey

WWF
Champion—Ultimate Warrior
1—Kerry Von Erich
2—Curt Hennig
3—Earthquake
4—Hulk Hogan
5—Randy Savage
6—Rick Rude
7—Haku
8—Sgt. Slaughter
9—Dusty Rhodes
10—Big Bossman

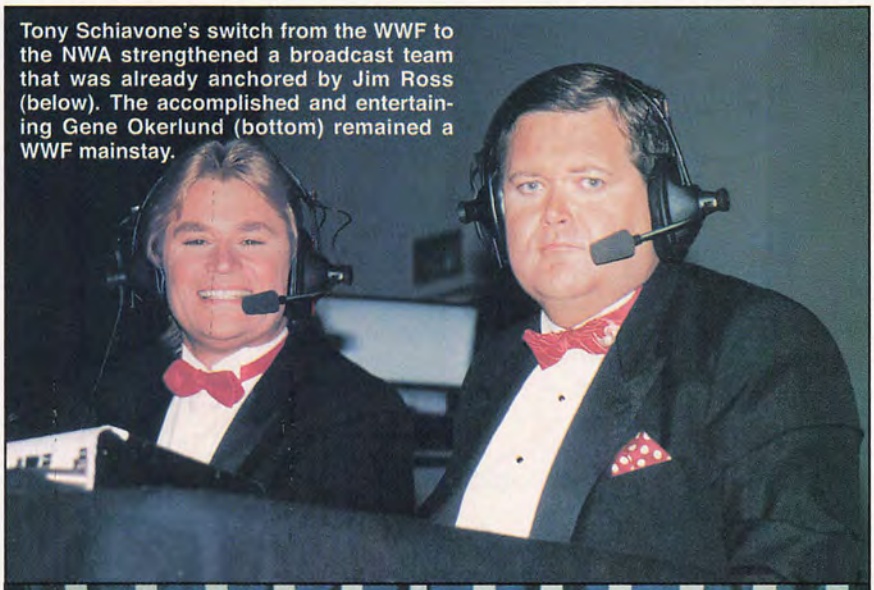
AWA
Champion—Larry Zbyszko
1—Nikita Koloff
2—Tatsumi Fujinami
3—The Trooper
4—Col. DeBeers
5—Scott Norton
6—D.J. Peterson
7—Mike Enos
8—Wayne Bloom
9—Harley Race
10—Larry Cameron

former world champions, while only three members of the current NWA roster (Flair, Stan Hansen, and Tommy Rich) can boast similar experience. The NWA's top 10, however, features promising young talent (Luger, Sid Vicious, Dan Spivey, and Black Scorpion), while the WWF list is bogged down by aging contenders (Sgt. Slaughter, Rhodes, Haku, Savage).

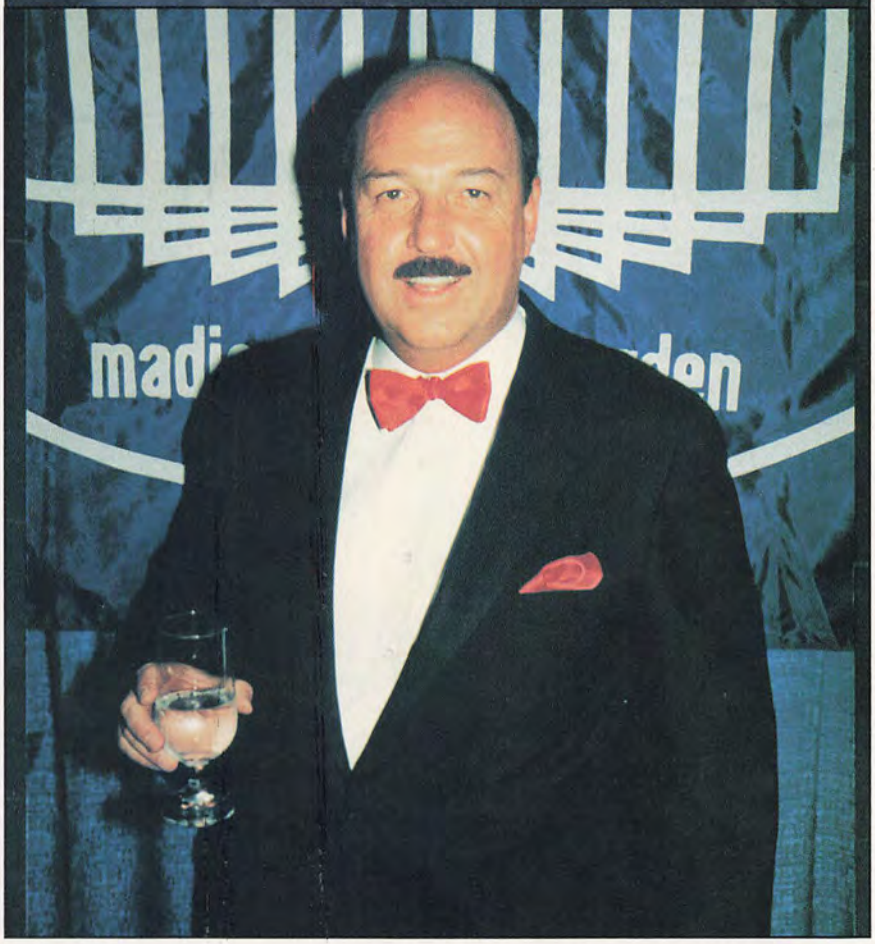
Edge: NWA

TAG TEAMS

Since the beginning of 1990, the NWA has devoted a great deal of attention to its tag team roster, and



Tony Schiavone's switch from the WWF to the NWA strengthened a broadcast team that was already anchored by Jim Ross (below). The accomplished and entertaining Gene Okerlund (bottom) remained a WWF mainstay.



A memorable (and bloody) cage match between Lex Luger and Ric Flair headlined the Capital Combat card in May 1990. At the time, the NWA seemed to pay more attention to each match on its supercards, rather than just the main events.

the effort has paid off. The current World tag team champions, Doom (Ron Simmons and Butch Reed), have worked hard to establish themselves as a powerful force. U.S. titlists Rick Rude and Scott Steiner are considered by many experts to be the finest young team in the world.

In addition to the champions, there are many more high-caliber NWA teams: The Rock 'n' Roll Express are four-time NWA World tag team champions, while The Midnight Express is the only team to have held the World and U.S. belts concurrently. The Southern Boys, Samoan Swat Team, and Freebirds also keep the NWA team scene competitive.

The WWF boasts a large number of duos, but fails to match the overall quality of the NWA. The Hart Foundation is two-time WWF tag champs, but former champs Demolition (Ax and Smash) have sullied their reputations by adding a third member (Crush) for no apparent reason.

The Legion of Doom remains an awesome force, but thus far they've seemed more concerned with six-man tag matches than trying to advance in the ratings. Other WWF teams include the comical but underachieving Bushwhackers and Rhythm 'n' Blues, the mismanaged Orient Express, the promising Power 'n' Glory, and the stagnant Rockers.

Edge: NWA

ROSTER DEPTH

For years, the WWF has had the greatest number of quality singles wrestlers. Failing to qualify for the WWF's top 10 are outstanding competitors such as Ted DiBiase, Jimmy Snuka, Jake Roberts, Dino Bravo, Ronnie Garvin, The Warlord, The Barbarian, Tito Santana, Saba Simba, and Tugboat.

Perhaps the most amazing thing about the WWF is the large number of preliminary wrestlers who were formerly main-event grapplers. Struggling to break out of opening-match status are former champions Black Bart (World Class), Dustin Rhodes (PWF), Buddy Rose (AWA World tag team), Bob Bradley (Texas), and Koko B. Ware (CWA tag team).

While the NWA's talent roster is by no means weak, it thins out far more quickly than the WWF's. Struggling to break in to the top 10 are Buddy Landell, Big Van Vader, Terry Taylor, Brian Pillman, Tom Zenk, and Brad Armstrong. The NWA seems more concerned with developing a pool of promising stars than stockpiling main-event names. Too many top wrestlers, however, come and go from the NWA at a rapid rate (including The Great Muta, Mark Callous, and Paul Orndorff).

Edge: WWF

TELEVISION PRODUCTION

The TV wrestling wars of 1984 may have been the biggest story of that year. The WWF bought out the NWA's television time on TBS, but a flood of viewer complaints brought the NWA back in a different time slot. In 1985, Jim Crockett Promotions purchased the original time slot from Vince McMahon, who was having extreme trouble meeting Ted Turner's requirement that the program be produced in his Atlanta studio.

Since then, the WWF's cable home has been the USA Network, while media mogul Turner has attempted to improve the NWA's profile on TBS since purchasing the promotion from Crockett in late-1988. However, the WWF took the early lead in television production values and continue to be the industry standard.

The WWF productions were the first to include high-tech extras such as interview insertions during matches, multiple cameras, and sweetened (overdubbed) sound, and they employ these techniques on almost every broadcast. In addition, the WWF continues to employ a wide variety of an-

nouncers (McMahon, Gorilla Monsoon, Roddy Piper, Alfred Hayes, Sean Mooney, Gene Okerlund), helping to keep the programs fresh. Glaring omissions: the departure of commentators Tony Schiavone (now with the NWA) and Jesse Ventura.

With Jim Ross, Schiavone, Bob Caudle, and Gordon Solie, the NWA's announcing crew measures up to the WWF's, but the overall quality of the broadcasts aren't quite equal. While the WWF travels the country and presents programs from major arenas, the NWA sticks to smaller venues like Georgia's Cobb County Center, many times offering shows before half-filled buildings. In addition, the camera work and direction of the NWA programs, even *Clash Of Champions* specials, is not as crisp as on the WWF broadcasts.

Another big advantage the WWF has is its penetration of the nation's media markets. WWF syndicated programs are currently seen on 244 stations, covering 97 percent of the United States. The NWA airs on 174 stations, covering 94 percent of the country.

Edge: WWF

SUPERCARDS

The NWA's most recent pay-per-view spectaculars—Wrestle War '90, Capital Combat '90, and the Great American Bash—have been thrilling events featuring outstanding matchups throughout the cards. When it comes to providing excitement from bell to bell, the NWA takes a backseat to no other promotion.

In fact, the NWA strategy of offering action-packed pay-per-view events seems to differ from the WWF. Usually, WWF supercards put the emphasis on the main

A RANKING-BY-RANKING COMPARISON

The biggest argument among fans comparing the WWF and NWA boils down to simply this: Which federation has the better wrestlers? The chart below, based on the top 10 rankings for each federation from this issue, and considering the results of a one-on-one matchup between the stars, attempts to answer that very question. Our result: The NWA edges out the WWF slightly, by a score of 6-5.

RANKING	NWA	WWF	COMMENTS
Champion	Sting	Ultimate Warrior	Sting's agility and science vs. Warrior's sheer power. Would Sting's knee injury come into play? Would Warrior's stamina fail early? For better scientific skills, plus wider experience against better competition, we call it Edge: NWA
1	Lex Luger	Kerry Von Erich	U.S. champ vs. Intercontinental champ. Both have experience, both have impressive power, and both have considerable scientific repertoires. Kerry downed Ric Flair for the NWA World title; Luger couldn't. Edge: WWF
2	Ric Flair	Curt Hennig	Both men have deep scientific repertoires. Both men have world championship experience. Both men have massive ego problems. Flair, however, has set the standard for cunning. Edge: NWA
3	Black Scorpion	Earthquake	Who is the Scorpion? Which Scorpion would Earthquake be facing? No matter, Earthquake has the confidence that comes with having put Hulk Hogan out of action—and a surprising dropkick. Edge: WWF
4	Sid Vicious	Hulk Hogan	Kerry Von Erich once called Vicious "the most awesome man I've ever wrestled," but a lung injury has made the Horseman tentative. And Hogan is, after all, Hogan. Edge: WWF
5	Stan Hansen	Randy Savage	Hansen's a triple-champion in Japan, a sadistic brawler, and never takes a step back from anyone. Savage has softened since taking the crown from Hacksaw Duggan. Edge: NWA
6	Arn Anderson	Rick Rude	Low-key and understated, TV champion Anderson has deep scientific skills. Rude has strength and skill, but they're watered down by his penchant for playing to the girls in the front row. Edge: NWA
7	Junkyard Dog	Haku	The Dog has heart, but struggles to move his massive girth around the ring. Haku's experience and determination would give him an easy win. Edge: WWF
8	Tommy Rich	Sgt. Slaughter	"Wildfire" has been wrestling better now than he has in years. Slaughter, too, is revitalized, but can he get his game face on without the issue of patriotism as stake? Edge: NWA
9	Mike Rotundo	Dusty Rhodes	Rotundo's significant amateur background would partially counteract Rhodes' peerless pro experience; Rhodes' pathetic blathering about losing Sapphire would do the rest. Edge: NWA
10	Dan Spivey	Big Bossman	Since rejecting rulebreaking, Bossman has become a formidable force. Spivey, meanwhile, continues the haphazard career path he has experienced since his 1983 pro debut. Edge: WWF

event, while offering pointless matches (such as The Orient Express vs. Hacksaw Duggan and Nikolai Volkoff or The Warlord vs. Tito Santana at SummerSlam) to round out the undercards. The WWF's cards have a more glossy look, but the NWA is miles ahead in terms of action.

Edge: NWA

OUTLOOK FOR THE FUTURE

The WWF has tremendous depth and stability. When a wrestler signs with the WWF, fans are virtually assured that the star will remain with the organization for a long time. In addition to its healthy talent base, the WWF has also developed a huge network of arenas in all major cities throughout the U.S. and Canada—and even overseas.

Conversely, the NWA's stronghold continues to be mainly in the South, but there are signs that long-hoped-for expansion is on the way. Two recent cards in New Jersey's Byrne Meadowlands Arena drew healthy crowds, though months earlier the federation fared poorly in California. The NWA desperately needs to expand along both coasts.

Edge: WWF

THE VERDICT

Fans watch wrestling for different reasons. Because of this, your personal attitude toward the sport may cause you to weigh the above categories differently.

Weighing the categories equally, however, we conclude that the NWA, receiving the edge in four categories out of seven, is better than the WWF.

But we can't make your decision for you. All we can do is provide some of the evidence, arguments, and tools to weigh both sides of the argument. □

PWI, January 1991

The Cover: The Monday Night War between the WWF and WCW would not be declared for several years, but we were already instigating with this special comparison of the sport's powerhouses. As for the headline atop the cover, the answer—thankfully—was yes.

Rookie Crop: What do Steve Austin, Mike Awesome, Blade Hunter, Chris Chavis, Shelly Francis, El Gigante, Allen Iron Eagle, Rochester Roadblock, Tasmanian Devil, and Chris Von Erich have in common? They were our candidates for Rooke of the Year honors.

Hollywood Hogan Indeed: After the release of *No Holds Barred*, the chatter about Hulk Hogan permanently leaving the squared circle for the silver screen began to get louder. Of course, we all know now that wrestlers can't become Hollywood superstars, right?

Stan The Man: After this "Press Conference," editors Craig Peters, Andy Rodriguez, and Bob Smith admitted that they were somewhat afraid for their own well being. After being fined $5,000 and suspended 30 days for attacking NWA referee Randy Anderson, Stan Hansen was in a foul, foul mood.

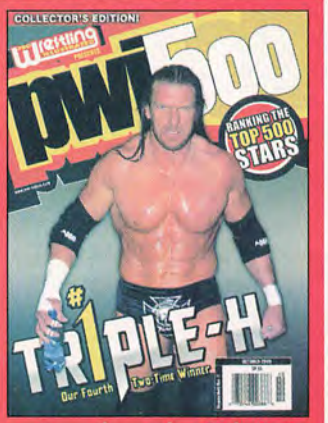
A Sting Thing: When our photographer was assigned to shoot Sting at and around his California home for "A Day Off With The NWA World Champion," he did it the right way—with Sting's permission. Got that, Alex Shelley?

between falls

PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED welcomes readers' comments on any of our stories or columns.

Send letters to:
BETWEEN FALLS Box 96, Ft. Washington, PA 19034
Or you can e-mail your comments to
prowrestlingillustrated@yahoo.com

HHH NO.1—AGAIN



It may have taken Triple-H nine years to reappear in the "*PWI* 500's" top spot, but he was the clear choice among the editors—and seemingly among readers.

"*PWI*, you got it right!" wrote Nino Ortiz of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. "Orton, Cena, and Angle, had their moments, but Triple-H was the most consistent."

As much as readers lauded Triple-H at one, just as many supported Chris Jericho as runner-up.

"Jericho really did have a tremendous year," wrote Kelly Munz of Dayton, Ohio. "He did a lot of talking, but he backed it up in the ring."

You can go to various Internet message boards to participate in "*PWI* 500" debates, and to be honest, the people are not always very kind to us. So we like the sentiment of Roger Addison, a long-time subscriber from Green Bay, Wisconsin, who wrote: "Everybody likes to criticize the '500,' and while debate is what the list is all about, I'd like to see any of those know-it-alls come up with a listing of their own, post it on the Internet, and see what kind of reaction their list gets. Lighten up, everybody, this is supposed to be fun."

RUMOR VS. FACT

A few weeks ago, I heard a rumor that Ted DiBiase Jr. was going to attack Randy Orton and separate from Legacy, but as each week passes, it seems he only gets closer and closer with Orton. I am truly disappointed by that because I think Ted Jr. could really go far in WWE and maybe even win a world title. Somebody needs to get in Ted's ear and convince him to leave Orton and Rhodes behind.

LONNIE GWYNN
San Diego, CA

AMERICAN NIGHTMARE

Shame on Dusty Rhodes for orchestrating that sneak-attack on John Cena on *Raw*. I understand that as a father he wants to do whatever he can to help his son Cody. But to unleash four wrestlers on Cena was unnecessary. Rhodes was always a sneak. I should have known when he was announced as the guest host of *Raw* that night something was going to happen.

FRED HUGHES
Sarasota, FL

"FEMALE 50" FEEDBACK

After reading your "*PWI* Female 50" ranking (November 2009), I must say that I was surprised to see that Alicia Fox was not on the list.

Fox is strong, athletic, and beautiful. She has all the characteristics a WWE Diva should possess, and I think she'll be wearing one of WWE's women's titles before long.

GLADYS BETANCOURT
Gary, IN

I just received my issue of the "Female 50" and I am stunned. How can it be that Melina was not awarded the top spot?

I understand she dropped the Women's title to Michelle McCool, but she was the best female wrestler on the planet the rest of the year!

Photo By George Napolitano

Rather than kowtow to Randy Orton, reader Lonnie Gwynn of San Diego, California, says Ted DiBiase Jr. should step away from Legacy to focus on his own career.

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Alicia Fox, dropkicking Katie Lea Burchill, deserved a place in the "Female 50" rankings, in the view of reader Gladys Betancourt of Gary, Indiana.

I challenge anybody to name a female wrestler with a more dynamic move set and as much sex appeal as Melina. Mickie James? She fell off the radar for five months before she beat Maryse, and she wasn't forced to overcome injuries like Melina. I have nothing against Mickie, but she didn't have the year Melina did.

ASHLEY SIMMONDS
San Francisco, CA

Mickie James rocks. I was so glad to see her finish in the "Female 50" top spot. Nobody deserved it more than Mickie!

ALICIA GOODENOW
New York, NY

Bold move putting Angelina Love number two in your "Female 50." While she did manage to win two TNA Knockouts championships over the past year, it should be pointed out that many of her victories came due to outside interference from Velvet Sky and Madison Rayne, her Beautiful People cohorts. I would like to see Love and Tara face off in a best-of-seven series, with Sky and Rayne banished from ringside, to see who is really the better wrestler.

FRANK TURNER
Fargo, ND

MORE COMPETITION, PLEASE

After reading your article on Kurt Angle ("Kurt Angle Takes His 'I' Off The Ball: Whatever Became Of Integrity?" November 2009), I would like to answer that question: He left it in WWE.

In WWE, Angle was able to showcase his skills against superior competition—Triple-H, The Rock, Brock Lesnar, The Undertaker. He was forced to stay focused and keep his "I" on the ball.

That hasn't been the case in TNA, where the lack of competition (A.J. Styles excluded) has allowed him to drift. First, it was his wife, Karen, and then it was the Main Event Mafia. Perhaps Angle has become bored in TNA. The powers that be need to bring in stiffer competition to motivate Angle.

WILLIAM RIORDAN
Lake Charles, LA

ELITE ERIC

I know I'm probably in the minority, but I would like to congratulate Eric Young on making a wise career choice and forming the World Elite in TNA.

Young's talent is undeniable, but it has always been overshadowed by the stupid storylines he had to take part in. Now that Super Eric is gone, and Young is no longer part of the Frontline, I hope his wrestling ability can shine through so that TNA fans will finally recognize him as a true superstar and among the best wrestlers in TNA.

ANN SCHILTZ
Washington, D.C.□

PWI official ratings

For period ended September 15, 2009

TOP 10

1. **JOHN CENA**
   240, West Newbury, MA
   (4) WWE heavyweight champion
2. **C.M. PUNK**
   222, Chicago, IL
   (6) WWE World champion
3. **RANDY ORTON**
   245, St. Louis, MO
   (1) No. 1 contender: WWE heavyweight title
4. **THE UNDERTAKER**
   299, Death Valley, CA
   (-) No. 1 contender: WWE World title
5. **KURT ANGLE**
   233, Pittsburgh, PA
   (2) TNA World champion
6. **CHRISTIAN**
   235, Toronto, Ontario
   (9) ECW champion
7. **AUSTIN ARIES**
   202, Milwaukee, WI
   (5) Ring of Honor champion
8. **BLUE DEMON JR.**
   228, Mexico City, Mexico
   (8) NWA champion
9. **YOSHIHIRO TAKAYAMA**
   280, Tokyo, Japan
   (-) AJPW Triple Crown champion
10. **JOHN MORRISON**
    219, Los Angeles, CA
    (-) WWE Intercontinental champion

John Morrison

TAG TEAMS

1. **CHRIS JERICHO & THE BIG SHOW**
   Combined weight: 711 pounds
   (1) WWE Unified tag team champions
2. **SCOTT STEINER & BOOKER T**
   Combined weight: 532 pounds
   (2) TNA World tag team champions
3. **SHAD GASPARD & JTG**
   Combined weight: 530 pounds
   (9) No. 1 contender WWE Unified tag title
4. **TED DiBIASE JR. & CODY RHODES**
   Combined weight: 454 pounds
   (-) No. 2 contenders: WWE Unified tag title
5. **DAVEY RICHARDS & EDDIE EDWARDS**
   Combined weight: 395 pounds
   (6) ROH tag team champions
6. **RODERICK STRONG & ERICK STEVENS**
   Combined weight: 447 pounds
   (7) FIP tag team champions
7. **RASCHE BROWN & KEITH WALKER**
   Combined weight: 560 pounds
   (3) NWA tag team champions
8. **BO & DUKE ROTUNDO**
   Combined weight: 536 pounds
   (-) FCW tag team champions
9. **BRUTUS MAGNUS & DOUG WILLIAMS**
   Combined weight: 475 pounds
   (10) IWGP tag team champions
10. **BROTHER DEVON & BROTHER RAY**
    Combined weight: 560 pounds
    (4) No. 1 contenders TNA World tag team title

RAW

WWE Champion:
JOHN CENA
(1) 240, West Newbury, MA

1—**RANDY ORTON** *(C) 245, St. Louis, MO*
2—**TRIPLE-H** *(2) 255, Greenwich, CT*
3—**KOFI KINGSTON** *(4) 218, Jamaica*
4—**M.V.P.** *(5) 249, Miami, FL*
5—**JACK SWAGGER** *(6) 285, Perry, OK*
6—**THE MIZ** *(10) 231, Cleveland, OH*
7—**EVAN BOURNE** *(7) 183, St. Louis, MO*
8—**SHAWN MICHAELS** *(–) 225, San Antonio, TX*
9—**TED DiBIASE JR.** *(3) 235, Palm Springs, FL*
10—**MATT HARDY** *(–) 213, Cameron, NC*

SMACKDOWN

World Champion:
C.M. PUNK
(1) 222, Chicago, IL

1—**THE UNDERTAKER** *(–) 299, Death Valley, CA*
2—**JOHN MORRISON** *(2) 219, Los Angeles, CA*
3—**CHRIS JERICHO** *(5) 226, Manhasset, NY*
4—**DOLPH ZIGGLER** *(4) 221, Hollywood, CA*
5—**FINLAY** *(–) 233, Belfast, N. Ireland*
6—**KANE** *(6) 323, Hell*
7—**THE GREAT KHALI** *(8) 420, Bombay, India*
8—**R-TRUTH** *(–) 228, Charlotte, NC*
9—**DAVID HART SMITH** *(9) 260, Calgary, Alberta*
10—**DREW McINTYRE** *(–) 250, Ayr, Scotland*

ECW

Champion:
CHRISTIAN
(C) 235, Toronto, Ontario

1—**WILLIAM REGAL** *(8) 240, Blackpool, England*
2—**VLADIMIR KOZLOV** *(2) 302, Moscow, Russia*
3—**EZEKIEL JACKSON** *(6) 285, Harlem, NY*
4—**TOMMY DREAMER** *(1) 265, Yonkers, NY*
5—**SHEAMUS** *(4) 280, Dublin, Ireland*
6—**SHELTON BENJAMIN** *(–) 248, Orangeburg, SC*
7—**TYLER REKS** *(7) 252, Laguna Beach, CA*
8—**ZACK RYDER** *(10) 214, Glen Cove, NY*
9—**HURRICANE HELMS** *(–) 215, Raleigh, NC*
10—**YOSHI TATSU** *(5) 230, Gifu, Japan*

TNA

World Champion:
KURT ANGLE
(C) 233, Pittsburgh, PA

1—**MATT MORGAN** *(3) 305, Fairfield, CT*
2—**SAMOA JOE** *(4) 280 Los Angeles, CA*
3—**STING** *(2) 255, Venice Beach, CA*
4—**KEVIN NASH** *(9) 315, Detroit, MI*
5—**HERNANDEZ** *(5) 285, Houston, TX*
6—**SUICIDE** *(–) 232, Parts Unknown*
7—**DANIELS** *(7) 224, Los Angeles, CA*
8—**ROBERT ROODE** *(–) 250, New York, NY*
9—**HOMICIDE** *(6) 205, Brooklyn, NY*
10—**BOBBY LASHLEY** *(–) 252, Denver, CO*

Top 10 and Tag Team ratings are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and inherent skill of each wrestler or team. These ratings are compiled by the magazine's editorial board. All other ratings are based on the official current positions of challengers to the top title in each category; The number in parentheses indicates a wrestler's position in that category last issue; (–) indicates that the wrestler was not rated in that category last issue, while (C) indicates the wrestler was champion in that category last issue.

CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Roger Hamm; **1**—Billy Lit; **2**—Eric St. Clair; **3**—Joey Morton; **4**—Rip Manson; **5**—War Machine; **6**—Stacy McLamb; **7**—Todd Austin; **8**—Mighty Hojo; **9**—Tom Sawyer; **10**—Dave Scott.

COASTAL CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Dok Rivers; **1**—Pablo Marquez; **2**—Kahagas; **3**—Sabu; **4**—Bruno Sassi; **5**—J.B. Cool; **6**—Alex G.; **7**—Mikhail Ivanoff; **8**—The Warlord; **9**—Chasyn Rance; **10**—Jimmy Snuka.

COMBAT ZONE WRESTLING: Champion—Drake Younger; **1**—Sami Callihan; **2**—Jon Moxley; **3**—Ego Fantastico; **4**—Greg Excellent; **5**—Devon Moore; **6**—T.J. Cannon; **7**—Bruce Maxwell; **8**—Danny Havoc; **9**—Tyler Veritas; **10**—Adam Cole.

ELITE PRO WRESTLING ALLIANCE: Champion—Jake Davis; **1**—Jim Duggan; **2**—Flex Phenom; **3**—Sinister Cross; **4**—Leslie Leatherman; **5**—Griffen; **6**—Vincent Vega; **7**—Man-Thing; **8**—Sean Tyler; **9**—Mojo the Spidermonkey; **10**—Brandon Draconis.

GROUND XERO WRESTLING: Champion—Pharaoh; **1**—Martin Stanley Fuqua; **2**—Eddie Diamond; **3**—Phil Brown; **4**—Shorty Smalls; **5**—Mitch A. Palooza; **6**—Mark Bravara; **7**—Deimos; **8**—Peter Spade; **9**—Kevin Daniels; **10**—Deacon Strickland.

IWF PREMIER PRO WRESTLING: Champion—Hoodlum; **1**—The Miracle That Is Tony; **2**—Jay Synn; **3**—Joshua; **4**—Prodigee; **5**—Adrian Grimm; **6**—Shredder Con; **7**—Arik Angel; **8**—Syngin Tiger Smith; **9**—Damion Payne; **10**—Anderson.

MID-STATES WRESTLING: Champion—Michael Barry; **1**—Stephen E; **2**—Jake Boulder; **3**—Gary Gram; **4**—Doomsday; **5**—Jason Jones; **6**—Jim Fallon; **7**—Shane Morbid; **8**—Jack Legacy; **9**—Dustin Heritage; **10**—Bubba Hall.

TENNESSEE INDEPENDENT WRESTLING FEDERATION: Champion—Lawman Williams; **1**—Kilo; **2**—P.K. Ripper; **3**—Rick Cataldo; **4**—Chico Mendoza; **5**—Sgt. Payne; **6**—Devon Day; **7**—Big Brad Sampson; **8**—A.C. Styles; **9**—Frankie Tucker; **10**—Knockout Kid.

WOMENS SUPERSTARS UNCENSORED: Champion—Mercedes Martinez; **1**—Nikki Roxx; **2**—Rain; **3**—Angel Orsini; **4**—Amber O'Neal; **5**—LaTasha; **6**—Ariel; **7**—Hailey Hatred; **8**—Jessicka Havok; **9**—Alicia; **10**—Cindy Rogers.

WORLD OF UNPREDICTABLE WRESTLING: Champion—Tristan Spade; **1**—Tim Arson; **2**—Astro Boricua; **3**—The Musketeer; **4**—Will Style; **5**—Rick Cataldo; **6**—Mikey Firezone; **7**—Chris Verrazano; **8**—Minyon; **9**—Billy Walker; **10**—David Rivera.

WORLD REVOLUTIONS ENTERTAINMENT: Champion—John Deaton; **1**—Joshua La Rue; **2**—Puerto Rican Punisher; **3**—Tank McClain; **4**—Brandon Groom; **5**—Brandon Nichols; **6**—Brian Black; **7**—Dodder Green; **8**—Mike Valentine; **9**—Eric Raiden; **10**—Kaoz.

XTREME INTENSE CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—The DBA; **1**—Jaimy Coxxx; 2. T.D.; **3**—Eddie Venom; **4**—Jimmy Jacobs; **5**—Toby Klein; **6**—Levi Blue; **7**—Necro Butcher; **8**—Josh Raymond; **9**—Jeff Brooks; **10**—Kid Statik.

RING OF HONOR

Champion:
AUSTN ARIES
(C) 202, Milwaukee, WI

1—TYLER BLACK
(1) 210, Davenport, IA
2—RODERICK STRONG
(3) 212, Tampa, FL
3—JERRY LYNN
(2) 185, Minneapolis, MN
4—CLAUDIO CASTAGNOLI
(4) 240, Schaffhausen, Switz.
5—BRYAN DANIELSON
(6) 185, Aberdeen, WA
6—COLT CABANA
(5) 233, Chicago, IL
7—KENNY OMEGA
(7) 200, Waikiki, HI
8—SONJAY DUTT
(10) 180, Bombay, India
9—DELIRIOUS
(–) 194, Edge of Sanity
10—JOEY RYAN
(–) 215, Los Angeles, CA

NWA

Champion:
BLUE DEMON JR.
(C) 228, Mexico City, Mexico

1—ADAM PEARCE
(1) 248, San Diego, CA
2—OLIVER JOHN
(2) 228, Sacramento, CA
3—APOLLO
(3) 265, Ponce, Puerto Rico
4—SCOTTY MAC
(4) 205, Kelowna, B.C.
5—BRENT ALBRIGHT
(5) 236, Tulsa, OK
6—PHIL SHATTER
(6) 247, Paris Island, SC
7—RICK FULLER
(7) 325, Middleboro, MA
8—MANABU NAKANISHI
(8) 186, Kyoto, Japan
9—EL DANDY
(9) 200, Tijuana, Mexico
10—MUSCLE GANG
(10) 297, San Diego, CA

JAPAN

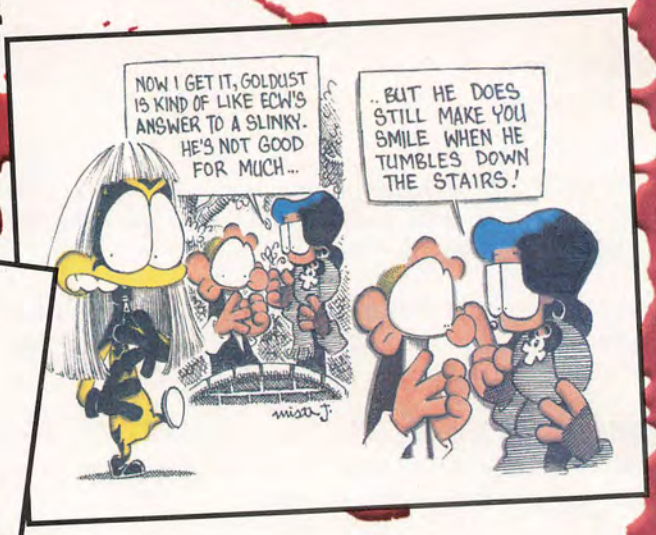
1—YOSHIHIRO TAKAYAMA
(2) 280, Tokyo, Japan
AJPW Triple Crown champion
2—TOGI MAKABE
(4) 243, Sagamihara, Japan
3—SHINSUKE NAKAMURA
(9) 245, Kyoto, Japan
4—GO SHIOZAKI
(3) 220, Kumamoto, Japan
GHC heavyweight champion
5—HIROSHI TANAHASHI
(1) 231, Gifu, Japan
6—SUWAMA
(–) 265, Kanagawa, Japan
7—KENTA
(–) 180, Saitama, Japan
8—YUJI NAGATA
(–) 238, Chiba, Japan
9—TAKASHI SUGIURA
(5) 216, Aichi, Japan
10—MASATO TANAKA
(10) 216, Wakayama, Japan

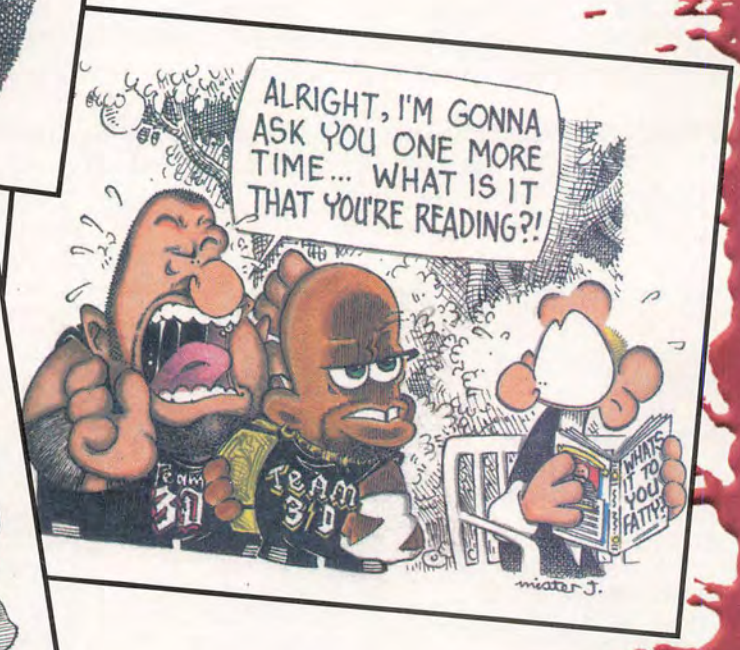
MEXICO

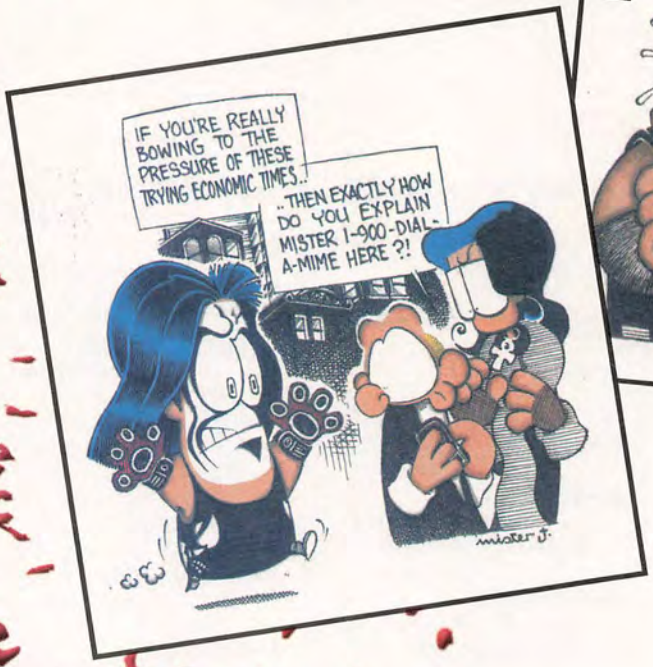
1—DR. WAGNER JR.
(2) 216, Torreon, Mexico
2—MISTICO
(5) 167, Mexico City, Mexico
3—MESIAS
(3) 245, Bayamon, Puerto Rico
4—ULTIMO GUERRERO
(1) 210, Gomez Palacio, Mexico
5—CIBERNETICO
(10) 234, Aguascalientes, Mexico
6—NEGRO CASAS
(–) 185, Mexico City, Mexico
7—ALEX KOSLOV
(–) 190, Moscow, Russia
8—BLUE PANTHER
(–) 194, Gomez Palacio, Mexico
9—CHESSMAN
(–) Villa Nicolas Romero, Mexico
10—LA SOMBRA
(–) 175, Gomez Palacio, Mexico

Drawing Blood

By Jason Conlan


NOW I GET IT, GOLDUST IS KIND OF LIKE ECW'S ANSWER TO A SLINKY. HE'S NOT GOOD FOR MUCH...
..BUT HE DOES STILL MAKE YOU SMILE WHEN HE TUMBLES DOWN THE STAIRS!
mister J.




IF YOU'RE REALLY BOWING TO THE PRESSURE OF THESE TRYING ECONOMIC TIMES..
..THEN EXACTLY HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN MISTER 1-900-DIAL-A-MIME HERE?!
mister J.

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